

Exhibit 30

Section a

NewsRoom

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Why are American colleges addressing **caste discrimination**? An 'opportunity to educate'
Caste is unfamiliar to many Americans, but colleges, at the urging of
South Asian students, include it in their anti-discrimination policies.

Chris **Quintana**, USA TODAY

Meet Prem Pariyar, 37, a Nepali immigrant and member of a growing community pushing American universities to rebuke **caste discrimination**.

Caste is painfully familiar to Pariyar. His family is considered Dalit, the lowest rung of the hierarchical system known as caste in which people are assigned social status based on their birth.

To encounter caste-based discrimination in America, Pariyar said, was an unwelcome shock. He had fled Nepal to avoid the prejudice and violence, but he found he, his wife and children were still ostracized in America in connection to their caste. The bias can be subtle – people backing away when they learn his last name or insisting that he use different utensils at a party – but Pariyar felt it immediately.

"I thought I had left that **caste discrimination** in Nepal," Pariyar said. "I felt low. I came here to the United States and could not leave that caste identity."

India outlawed **caste discrimination** more than 50 years ago, but members of the Dalit community say they still face discrimination and hostility from those who sit atop the hierarchy. They had been relegated to hard and unpleasant physical labor, such as cleaning bathrooms or disposing of dead animals. Their caste could limit where they lived or whom they married.

After the surprise wore off, Pariyar said, he felt he had to speak up. Most Americans might be unaware of caste, he said, but he thought they would understand when he explained the inequality at play.

He has been right. Pariyar has advocated for the social work department at California State University, East Bay to recognize caste as a social category that deserves special attention and protection. His efforts proved successful, and the university awarded him for drawing attention to the issue.

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He worked with the student government association representing the 23 colleges in the California State University system as they passed a resolution to ban **caste discrimination**. He said he was involved in efforts at the University of California, Davis to do the same.

That university was the latest and probably one of the first public institutions to adopt caste as a protected category in its anti-discrimination policy. It joins Colby College, a liberal arts institution in Maine that added caste as a protected group in October, and Brandeis University, a private university in Massachusetts that introduced its policy in 2019.

Many universities pride themselves on their commitment to diversity and inclusion, and the addition of caste would fall in line with that mission. Many colleges attract international students. India is second to China in sending the most students to America, according to a report from the Institute of International Education and the U.S. State Department.

It's not only universities grappling with caste. It's the tech sector, too.

The state of California filed a lawsuit against the software company Cisco in connection to caste-based discrimination. A group of 30 women from Dalit backgrounds wrote a letter to The Washington Post saying they faced **caste discrimination** in their workplace.

The San Francisco Chronicle highlighted UC Davis' move to adopt its guidance on **caste discrimination** this year. The newspaper reported that students, some of them anonymous, said their classmates had sent them insulting memes or weighed caste when choosing roommates.

UC Davis caste policy was 'opportunity to educate'

Danéssha Nichols, director of the Harassment and Discrimination Assistance and Prevention Program at UC Davis, said students and faculty pushed for the inclusion of caste in the anti-discrimination policy. She said the move was meant to be proactive, she said.

She said the university's previous anti-discrimination policies around "race, religion, ethnicity, ancestry and national origin" covered caste.

"But without a specific reference to this in policy, we realized we were missing an opportunity to educate our community about this important matter and to make clear this type of discrimination was prohibited," Nichols said.

Nichols said advocates connected the university with Equality Labs, a group focused on Dalit civil rights. That group praised the university's decision as part of a "larger national movement for caste equity that aims to protect caste-oppressed students, workers, and communities across the country."

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UC Davis may be the first public university to adopt caste in its anti-discrimination policy, but it followed in the footsteps of Brandeis University.

The private college in Massachusetts included caste in its anti-discrimination policy in 2019, saying the decision aligned with the university's founding values. Members of the American Jewish community started the college in 1948, "when Jews and other ethnic and racial minorities, and women, faced discrimination in higher education," according to the university.

A Brandeis administrator told Inside Higher Education, a trade publication, that no specific incident led to the adoption of the policy but that professors and students had said caste distinctions were present. A university administrator said other colleges might want to get ahead of the issue by adopting similar policies.

Margaret McFadden, provost of Colby College, said the liberal arts institution included caste as a protected category in October at the urging of its community members, particularly professor Sonja Thomas.

McFadden said people unfamiliar with the caste system were informed via workshops about its effects and potential to harm, and that made it a "very easy" decision to change the college's policy. McFadden said the college hadn't received reports of **caste discrimination** on campus, and the measure was preemptive.

"It's a way of sending a signal to members of our community and to potential members of our community that this is a place where we welcome everyone," she said. "It may be that this is happening within a small group of our community members, but it still matters."

The changes were greeted positively at Colby and UC Davis, but the experience of speaking can be intimidating for Pariyar and other Dalit activists. Pariyar said members of his community are sometimes reluctant to speak for fear of public backlash or that they may be attacked.

It's common for people, especially those higher up in the caste system, to deny the existence of such prejudice in America, he said. Pariyar said his employer supports him, but not all of his peers are lucky.

"We're in modern society and we talk about racial justice and we talk about justice for all," he said. "But why not for Dalit? Why not for caste?"

This article originally appeared on USA TODAY: Why are American colleges addressing **caste discrimination**? An 'opportunity to educate'

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Section b

BETA

BREAKING BUSINESS

Seattle Bans Caste Discrimination: What That Means And Why The Movement Against Social Stratification Is Growing

Conor Murray Forbes Staff

I am an explainers and trends reporter for Forbes.

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Feb 23, 2023, 10:47am EST

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TOPLINE Seattle City Council outlawed caste-based discrimination this week, a centuries-old form of social stratification with roots in South Asia, following years of activist organizing and similar bans at some American universities.



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Seattle City Councilmember Kshama Sawant proposed legislation to outlaw caste discrimination. (Photo ... [+] AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES)

KEY FACTS

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- The Seattle City Council became the first U.S. city to **ban** caste-based discrimination on February 21.
- The caste system is a social hierarchy structure that divides people at birth into social classes—it has **roots** in South Asia and Hinduism but also impacts African, Middle Eastern and Pacific communities.
- India outlawed caste-based discrimination decades ago, but violence against Dalits—members of the lowest level of the caste system—is still **pervasive**, and activists say the growing South Asian diaspora faces caste discrimination in the United States.
- Seattle’s legislation, proposed by council member Kshama Sawant, **classifies** caste as a protected class, like race and religion, under the city’s anti-discrimination laws.
- The council **approved** the legislation in a 6 to 1 vote following a years-long **push** by Dalit civil rights organization Equality Labs and other local and national groups, though it faced resistance from some South Asian groups who say it could unfairly subject Hindus to legal scrutiny.
- Efforts to address caste discrimination have proliferated in Seattle and Silicon Valley, where there are many South Asian residents, including some who have alleged caste discrimination in the tech industry (Washington state has more than 150,000

South Asian residents, with many based in the Seattle area, *The Washington Post* [reported](#)).

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- The anti-caste discrimination [movement](#) has gained steam in recent years: Brandeis University was the first U.S. college to make caste a protected class under its anti-discrimination policy in 2019, and others have followed suit, including the California State University system, Brown University, and the University of California, Davis.
- In 2021, the California Democratic Party added caste as a protected category in its code of conduct, [stating](#): “California must lead in the historical battle for caste equity and ensure we acknowledge the need for explicit legal protections for caste-oppressed Americans.”



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KEY BACKGROUND

The caste system [dates back](#) thousands of years with roots in Hinduism in India, though it also impacts other religions and

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countries. It separated the priest class, the highest level, from the warrior class, merchant class and laborer class, with the Dalits (formerly known as “untouchables”) falling below the caste system. India outlawed caste discrimination decades ago, but the Dalits still face violence. Dalits in India, who make up 17% of the country’s population, were victims of a crime every ten minutes in 2020, *The Washington Post* [reported](#). As the South Asian diaspora has grown, anti-caste discrimination groups said caste prejudice has followed to the United States, where activist groups like Equality Labs are pushing for an end to caste discrimination. Equality Labs director Thenmozhi Soundararajan told *The Washington Post* her organization has received complaints from hundreds of workers alleging “caste slurs in workplaces, bullying and harassment, sexual harassment, demotion to retaliation and even firing.” In 2020, 30 Dalit women employed at Silicon Valley tech companies including Google and Apple [published](#) a statement alleging caste discrimination at work and an inability to report instances because caste was not a protected class. The Alphabet Workers Union, which represents Google parent company Alphabet Inc. employees, has [urged](#) the company to explicitly ban caste discrimination.

CHIEF CRITIC

Some South Asian organizations, who worry codifying anti-caste discrimination measures will have the opposite of the intended effect, opposed the Seattle council vote. In a [statement](#), the Hindu American Foundation condemned caste discrimination but criticized the Seattle council for the “singling out of South Asians” and for putting them under additional legal scrutiny. The foundation’s managing director Samir Kalra criticized the council for “institutionalizing bias against all residents of Indian and South Asian origin.” Before the council vote, more than 100 businesses and organizations cosigned a [letter](#) urging councilmembers to vote “no,” stating that the “ordinance peddles bigotry and singles out the

South Asian community by using racist, colonial tropes of ‘caste’ and ensures that our community is subject to special scrutiny.”

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CRUCIAL QUOTE

“It’s official: our movement has WON a historic, first-in-the-nation ban on caste discrimination in Seattle! Now we need to build a movement to spread this victory around the country,” Seattle City Councilmember Kshama Sawant [tweeted](#) Tuesday.

BIG NUMBER

67%. That’s the percentage of Dalits living in the United States who said they’ve experienced unfair treatment in the workplace, according to an Equality Labs [survey](#) of 1,500 respondents.

WHAT TO WATCH FOR

Caste discrimination will soon be taken to court. A California state court will hear a [case](#) from a former Cisco employee who alleged he was discriminated against because of his caste. The unnamed plaintiff alleges he was excluded from meetings and denied promotions because he is a member of the Dalit caste. He further alleges he was retaliated against by his employer for making a complaint about his treatment.

FURTHER READING

[Seattle becomes first U.S. city to ban caste discrimination](#) (*The Washington Post*)

[Caste Discrimination Exists in the U.S., Too—But a Movement to Outlaw It Is Growing](#) (*TIME*)

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Section c

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DAHLEEN GLANTON

Column: White privilege — and the American caste system — were on display during the insurrection

By Dahleen Glanton
Chicago Tribune • Jan 11, 2021 at 5:00 am




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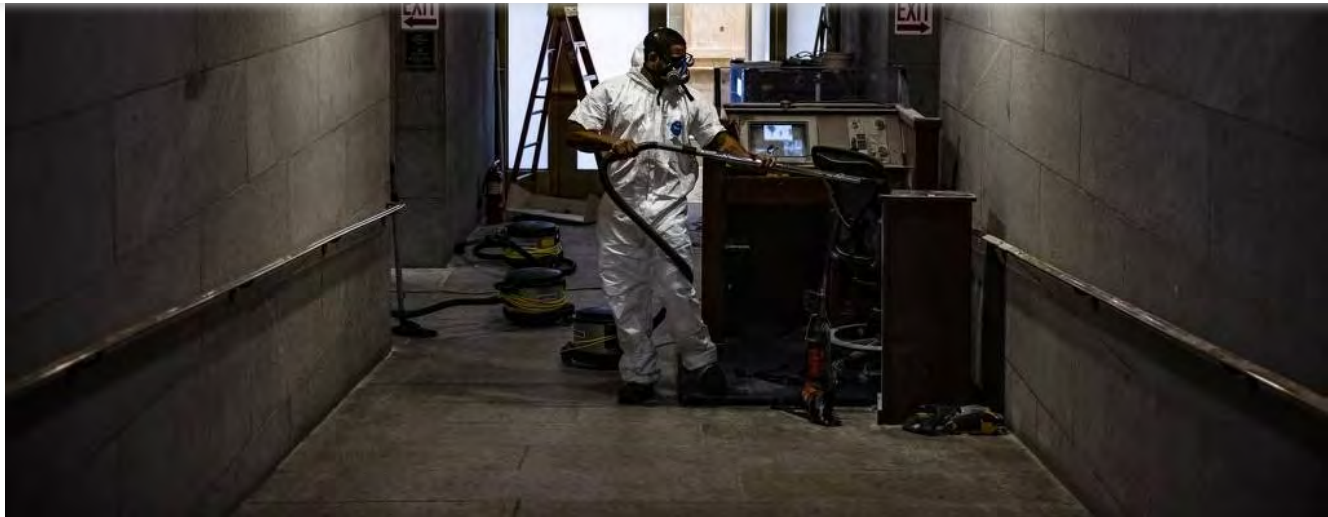
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A worker begins to clean up the debris and damage caused by a pro-Trump mob at the U.S. Capitol building on Jan. 7, 2021. (Samuel Corum/Getty)

When the insurrection on Capitol Hill was over, midlife Black men in navy blue custodial uniforms cleaned up the mess.

The viral video of the janitors sweeping debris from the hallway was as telling as any image of the day. It told a story beyond the photos of white people scaling the exterior walls of the Capitol, breaking windows to gain entry or the man lounging in the House speaker's office chair with his feet propped upon her desk.

It was a resignation without a word spoken. As is often the case, Black people were left to clean up the mess, this time left by whites who stormed the Capitol in an attempt to force Congress to invalidate Black votes.

Columns are **opinion content that reflect the views of the writers.**

There is one thing on which most of us can agree regarding the insurrection. White rioters were treated differently than African Americans. Black men — and women — likely would have been shot down for taking over this sacred building, the preeminent symbol of American democracy.

But white people, for the most part, were allowed to roam freely. When one of the rioters was done breaking the law, an officer held her arm and assisted her down the Capitol steps.

We should consider it progress that so many white people realize that a much harsher system of justice is applied to African Americans. Or perhaps what is new is that some white people are now quicker to say it publicly.

But saying it out loud is not enough.

We must come together as a nation to force the justice system into balance. However, we cannot begin to figure out how to do that until we understand why it always has been so lopsided.

It is easy to attribute everything that happens unfairly to African Americans to racism. Racism has become a catchall phrase for anything in which the majority race receives unwarranted precedence over the minority race.

Often, it is indeed racism, but that is not always the entire story.

My friend Isabel Wilkerson, whom I met years ago when she was a national correspondent for The New York Times based in Chicago, suggests that the injustice we most often see is something more complex. It is the adherence to a caste system that is as much a part of America's DNA as it was in Nazi Germany and today in India.

Her new book, "Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents," provides insight into the inner workings of America's caste system. She challenges us to delve deeper into a concept that for most Americans is foreign, if not incomprehensible.

In her book, Wilkerson describes America's caste system as a social hierarchy that was established centuries ago "based upon what people looked like, an internalized ranking, unspoken, unnamed, unacknowledged by everyday citizens even as they go about their lives adhering to it and acting upon it subconsciously to this day."

Caste and race are interwoven in America, she explains, and it can be hard to separate the two. She distinguishes them this way:

"Any action or institution that mocks, harms, assumes, or attaches inferiority or stereotype on the basis of the social construct of race can be considered racism," she writes.

"Any action or structure that seeks to limit, hold back, or put someone in a defined ranking, seeks to keep someone in their place by elevating or denigrating that person on the basis of their perceived category, can be seen as casteism.

"Casteism is the investment in keeping the hierarchy as it is in order to maintain your own ranking, advantage, privilege, or to elevate yourself above others or keep others beneath you."

Caste is structure, she writes. Caste is ranking. Simply put, caste is about keeping "those on your disfavored rung from gaining on you."

It should surprise no one that Black people rank lowest in the caste system and white people comprise the upper caste. So from their perch at the top of the hierarchy, white people are allowed to get away with things

that Black people cannot. Their entitlement is widely recognized, even by some in law enforcement.

According to Wilkerson, casteism “may flare and reassert itself in times of upheaval and recede in times of relative calm,” but it is always there.

Let’s look at what happened last week through the lens of the caste system.

Swarms of white people descended upon Washington demanding that the government return something they believed had been stolen from them, in this case, an election. They had no proof to back it up. Caste does not require it.

“Caste is the granting or withholding of respect, status, honor, attention, privileges, resources, benefit of the doubt, and human kindness to someone on the basis of their perceived rank or standing in the hierarchy,” Wilkerson writes.

Caste reaffirms white people’s standing. Even whites at the bottom of the social economic scale could be assured that they held title to something that no one else did — that America has always belonged to them.

Finally, there was a president who understood the natural order, and his supporters would go to any lengths to keep him in office.

So they burst into the Capitol. It was not trespassing, because this building and everything inside belonged to them. They shouted, “Our house! Our house!”

Richard Barnett was photographed lounging in House Speaker Nancy Pelosi’s office. Another man smiled and waved at cameras as he walked through the rotunda carrying the House speaker’s lectern. And another took a seat in the Senate chair that moments before had been occupied by Vice President Mike Pence as he presided over the joint session to certify Joe Biden as the 46th president of the United States.

Meanwhile, others swarmed the hallways wreaking havoc. When they were finished, most were allowed to walk away. It will take a long time for authorities to find all the offenders and charge them with crimes. Some likely will never be caught.

A caste system allows such a miscarriage of justice. It is not always intentional. It is simply inherent and most importantly, invisible. According to Wilkerson, its very invisibility is what gives it power and longevity.

Perhaps the most unseemly reward granted to those at the top of the hierarchy is entitlement. The caste structure sustains it and everyone, including some at the bottom, accepts it and sometimes, seemingly inexplicably, helps it to thrive.

It is common for those in the marginalized castes, Wilkerson writes, to “curry the favor and remain in the good graces of the dominant caste, all of which serves to keep the structure intact.”

That explains why an Afro Cuban might accept the leadership of the extremist group, the Proud Boys, and why a sprinkling of Black people always can be found among counterprotesters of Black Lives Matter. It is why a handful of Black people were among those who stormed the Capitol demanding that votes of other Black people in Pennsylvania, Michigan and Georgia be tossed out as illegitimate.

So when the cleaning crew arrived, it was expected that many would be African Americans. Though janitorial work is entirely respectable, certain jobs are reserved for those at the bottom of the hierarchy.

Their work at the end of the day was the continuum of the natural order. Cleaning up after those at the top reflects the internal ranking within America.

It is required under a system built on caste.

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Exhibit 30

Section d



VICE News

Silicon Valley Has a Caste Discrimination Problem

Dalit Indians working at U.S. tech companies tell VICE News they try to hide their identities to avoid caste-based discrimination they thought they had left behind.



By David Gilbert

August 5, 2020, 8:16am





When Maya, a computer scientist, left India in 2002 at age 21, she thought she was finally leaving her home country's oppressive caste system behind.

Maya is a Dalit, a group previously called “untouchables” in India’s caste system, which has structured Hindu society for centuries. Under the caste system, people are ranked at birth, and that impacts every aspect of their lives, including where they work, who they marry, and access to education.

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But she soon learned that caste discrimination didn't respect borders, and for 18 years she has faced discrimination at the hands of higher-caste Brahmin Indians who have established

and even used fake names to get work.

“You see the social seclusion within your colleagues. They don't want to eat lunch with you, they don't smile back at you, they do not have longer conversations with you,” Maya told VICE News. “If I use my real name, I get excluded from the interviews.”

For decades this silent discrimination had remained hidden, as Dalits have been terrified of speaking out over fears of losing their jobs or their visas. But that changed in June when the state of California filed a lawsuit against Cisco Systems and two of its employees, the first time in U.S. history that a government department has brought a case against a private company based on caste discrimination.

The complainant in this case is an Indian Dalit who alleged two of his colleagues, both higher-caste Indians, discriminated against him by isolating him from co-workers and denying him opportunities for advancement.

In the weeks since the lawsuit was announced, more than 250 Dalits from Google, Facebook, Microsoft, Apple, Netflix, and dozens of others in Silicon Valley have come forward to report discrimination, bullying, ostracization, and even sexual harassment by colleagues who are higher-caste Indians, according to data provided exclusively to VICE News by Dalit advocacy group Equality Labs.

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There have been 33 complaints from Dalit employees at Facebook, 20 complaints at Google, 18 at Microsoft, 24 more at Cisco, and 14 at Amazon. There were also complaints recorded from employees at Twitter, Dell, Netflix, Apple, Uber, and Lyft — as well dozens more complaints from a range of smaller Silicon Valley companies and some companies outside the technology sector.

equality case, told VICE News. “I think that the whole Valley is having that happen that the Cisco case.”

The claim of widespread caste discrimination across the Valley is backed up by the accounts of six Dalits living in the U.S. who told VICE News about their own experiences of discrimination that stretches all the way from America’s education system to some of the more valuable companies in the world.

“Caste discrimination is in every U.S. company where Indians are working.”

“Caste discrimination is in every U.S. company where Indians are working,” said Maya, who, like all the Dalits who spoke to VICE News, is using a pseudonym over fears that revealing her name and caste identity would jeopardize her job and future prospects.

Inside many tech companies, it’s not unusual to find all-Indian teams where Dalits can be subject to caste-based discrimination, which limits their opportunities.

“It’s kind of like the mob,” Soundarajan said. “You are not up against one bad apple; you are up against the whole network, and that’s what’s so challenging and why it’s been so difficult for people to come forward.”

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And it appears the companies where this is happening have done little to curb the practice through explicit policies to address caste issues, or they don’t even understand just how widespread the problem is.

about the issue of caste to even understand the meaning of these issues, so many people

More than 259 people have contacted Equality Labs in recent weeks to share details about their experiences, including discrimination in hiring, a toxic workplace culture, sexual harassment, caste slurs, demotions, and even firings based solely on their Dalit status and their superiors being of a higher caste.

Almost all of the companies ignored requests for comment on the complaints. Microsoft, Uber, and Netflix declined to comment on the record, while Dell, Cisco, and Twitter gave broad responses about promoting diversity and dealing with complaints — though none of the responses directly addressed the issue of caste.

Indians in America

Silicon Valley is overwhelmingly dominated by white men, especially at senior and executive level positions. But within the tech industry, Indians have carved out an important niche for themselves as skilled engineers and coders.

Indians migrants in the U.S. are typically highly educated with a median income twice as high as the general population. They also fill a significant skills gap in some of America's biggest companies.

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This is especially true in Silicon Valley, where India's tech-focused education systems provide a consistent supply line of highly educated workers. For example, more than 70% of H1-B visas

Sundar Pichai, the CEO of Google, and Satya Nadella, the CEO of Microsoft, are both Indian immigrants who come from the higher Brahmin caste and now lead two of the world's most powerful organizations.

But despite the Indian immigration story looking like a huge success, the largely ignored issue of caste discrimination against lower-caste Indians shows that deeply ingrained prejudices persist, and have left tens of thousands of people living in fear for decades.

Ingrained in the culture

India outlawed discrimination by caste in 1950 with the introduction of the Indian constitution. At the same time, the notion of “untouchability” was removed and the government introduced a program of affirmative action to ensure members of lower castes were given educational opportunities as well as a fixed minimum percentage of government jobs.

But despite these efforts, caste discrimination still plagues India. Just this week, a mob of more than a dozen people brutally beat up a Dalit man with sticks in the South Indian state of Karnataka just because he touched a scooter belonging to an upper-caste man.

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Caste is ingrained in India's culture, and it's been long expected that the system would travel with Indians as they migrate abroad.

“If Hindus migrate to other regions on earth, caste would become a world problem,” B.R. Ambedkar, a Dalit statesman, civil rights leader, and author of India's constitution, predicted

Over one hundred years later, that protection is coming back.

“There's no question that when Indians come to the United States, they carry their culture with them, and the overwhelming majority of them are higher-caste Hindus. Only about 1% of them are Dalits,” Kevin Brown, a professor at Indiana University’s Maurer School of Law who has been traveling to India to study caste discrimination for 25 years, told VICE News. “If they're identified as Dalit by the caste Hindus, there's no question they're subject to discrimination here in the U.S.”

Because the U.S. government does not track caste when handing out visas, there are no reliable figures available for how many of the roughly 3 million Indians currently living in the U.S. are Dalits.

Dalits make up roughly 25% of the Indian population, but because they are typically not afforded the same educational opportunities as higher-caste Indians, the number of Dalits coming to the U.S. is significantly lower.

But, even if Dalits made up just 1% of the Indian population in the U.S. — which is roughly 3 million — that would mean 30,000 Dalits are being discriminated against, with almost all of them living in fear, hiding their caste identity because revealing it would lead to harassment, firing, or social exclusion.

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And unlike in India, where caste discrimination is against the law, there are no such protections in the U.S.

...an highly connected across all companies, said, who has worked in over 100 companies, including Cisco, for the last 12 years, told VICE News.

But even before Dalit engineers get to Silicon Valley, they face discrimination.

‘Casteist monster’

In a survey conducted by Equality Labs in 2016, 40% of Dalit students reported facing discrimination in U.S. educational institutions, while just 3% of respondents who were from higher castes reported the same. Like what happened to Suresh, when he traveled from India to Fargo to study engineering at the North Dakota State University in 2012, when there were around 500 Indian students.

While working a part-time job, Suresh overheard some other Indian students denigrating lower-caste Indians, using casteist slurs against Dalits.

“I told him, ‘Because of a casteist monster like you, the world is not progressing.’”

problem. You know that because of your skin, you're considered to be inferior. That's a toxic mindset."

But as a result of this, fellow Indian students began ignoring him or avoiding him altogether.

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Two Dalit students who witnessed the incident told Suresh afterward that they would have backed him up but were afraid to be outed as Dalit because they'd be kicked out of their accommodations, as their roommates had insisted on renting rooms only to higher-caste Indians.

Suresh told VICE News that he's still in contact with one of those Dalits, who is working for Deloitte and still hiding his identity over fears he would lose his job.

'Are you vegetarian?'

Suresh is now working in the tech sector in the U.S., and while he hasn't experienced discrimination in his job, he has seen how openly Indians talk about it around mostly-oblivious Americans.

"I've seen IBM contractors on the same floor that I work openly talking about caste."

"I've seen IBM contractors on the same floor that I work openly talking about caste, openly talking down to the lower castes, saying these people don't deserve to be here and just really

This type of behavior is consistent with the allegations described in the video interview and that other Dalits told VICE News about the environment in U.S. tech companies where tight-knit groups of higher-caste Indians work.

Casteist discrimination can take different forms, both explicit and implicit.

Maya says her boss at one job, a higher-caste Indian, simply ignored her suggestions at meetings, until colleagues began to notice.

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Raina, who's been in the U.S. for 15 years, says her promotion was on hold for five years at one company where she worked with higher-caste Indians. When she moved to a different company with no other Indians, she was promoted within four months.

Bhaskar, who currently works with a "government company," says he's been working in the tech sector for 20 years, mostly as a contractor. In that time he has attended more than 100 interviews and says that only once when an Indian was on the panel conducting the interview did he get the job.

Indians will not ask outright what caste you are, as it's seen as overly discriminatory, but they use more subtle methods to identify your place in the caste structure.

"Sometimes they ask, 'Are you vegetarian?' If you say yes, they ask are you vegetarian by birth or by choice, before getting into which village you come from, because sometimes the village gives up your caste," Sam said.

various, a sacred white thread typically worn by the upper castes in India.

Higher-caste Indians will also search social media accounts to ascertain a job candidate's religious views or diet.

It's getting worse

While experiences of discrimination differed among the people VICE News spoke to, they all agreed on one thing: The caste discrimination problem in Silicon Valley — and in the U.S. generally — is getting worse, not better.

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"It's getting worse," Maya said. "Especially with a right-wing government in both India and the U.S., casteist supremacists have gotten emboldened."

Several specifically blamed Narendra Modi's increasingly divisive policies of Hindu nationalism, which, combined with Donald Trump's brand of populism in the U.S., has created an atmosphere that allows discrimination to thrive.

"What Modi is doing is pushing India toward a Hindu nation," Brown said. "He's doubling down on those Hindu beliefs, which untouchability is an aspect of it. India is beginning to embrace its Hindu traditions, which by definition leads to discrimination against Dalits because of the history of Hinduism."

The link between Modi's brand of nationalism and Trump's was seen clearly during a rare rally in Texas last year for a foreign leader, where the U.S. president described Modi as "one of America's greatest, most devoted and most loyal friends."

...and according to Raina, that experience has been mirrored among the migrant Indian community.

And now Dalits are worried that nothing will improve for the next generation.

"It's gotten really worse, and I am really worried for my daughter," Raina says, lamenting she doesn't let her daughter play with other Indian children over fears their families will begin asking about caste.

"I can deal with my isolation," Raina said. "I have other things I can focus on. But this 4-year-old, I don't know how I can answer her questions."

India Is Becoming Its Own Silicon Valley



Cover: A Facebook employee walks by a sign displaying the "like" sign at Facebook's corporate headquarters campus in Menlo Park, California, on October 23, 2019. (JOSH EDELSON/AFP via Getty Images)

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BOOKS

Oprah Winfrey picks Isabel Wilkerson's 'Caste' for her book club

By HILLEL ITALIE
Associated Press • Aug 04, 2020 at 8:22 am



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If not for the coronavirus, Oprah Winfrey says, she would be out in the streets and marching with the Black Lives Matter protesters.

She has instead found other ways to add her voice.

She is working with Lionsgate on a multimedia adaptation of The New York Times' "1619 Project" on the legacy of slavery. She interviewed Stacey Abrams and Ava DuVernay among others during a two-night special on her OWN network about racism and how to address it. The current issue of O: The Oprah Magazine features a cover photo of Breonna Taylor, the 26-year-old Black emergency room technician killed by police in her home in Louisville, Kentucky. It's the first time in the publication's 20-year history that Winfrey herself has not appeared on the front.

And on Tuesday, Winfrey announced she had chosen Isabel Wilkerson's exploration of race and hierarchy in the U.S., "[Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents](#)," as her latest book club pick.

Wilkerson's book, Winfrey said in a telephone interview, "could change the way we see each other, how we see our humanity and the structure of our world."

The 59-year-old Wilkerson is an author and journalist who won the National Book Critics Circle award in 2011 for her previous book, "The Warmth of Other Suns," about the Black migration from the South in the early 20th century. In "Caste," she looks at American history and the treatment of Blacks and finds what she calls an enduring, unseen and unmentioned caste system — not unlike those in India or Nazi Germany — that has yet to be fully confronted.

"You cannot solve a problem unless you identify it and define it," Wilkerson told The Associated Press, adding that Winfrey's endorsement means "many more people who have not learned about this will have the chance to read about something that deeply affects us all."

"Caste" was published Tuesday and already has won praise, with the Times calling it an "extraordinary document" and "almost certainly the keynote nonfiction book of the American century this far." Winfrey cited the book in June, listing it along with Robin DiAngelo's "White Fragility" and Ibram X. Kendi's "How To Be An Antiracist" as essential reads on racism.

"Caste" continues Winfrey's book club partnership with Apple that began last fall and includes such previous picks as Ta-Nehisi Coates' novel "The Water Dancer" and the nonfiction "Hidden Valley Road," by Robert Kolker. Winfrey, who has self-quarantined at home in Santa Barbara, California, since March, says she hopes to create a series of video conversations and podcasts with Wilkerson. An interview with Wilkerson will air this fall on Apple TV Plus.

Winfrey said many details in "Caste" were revelatory for her, such as the Nazis' admiration for the Jim Crow system.

"That was shocking to me," Winfrey said. "Hitler was using the racist South as a template for race purification in

Winfrey has been a literary tastemaker for decades, in part because of her commitment to a given book. She read “Caste” a few months ago, before bound, printed copies were available. Struggling with the digital edition Random House sent her, she asked for a physical version, however possible, and received from the publisher loose pages that she stapled together and placed in a three-ring binder. She then bought 500 copies, which she plans to send to leaders in business, sports and politics, including all 50 state governors.

“I am sending it to people I think will benefit from it and are open-minded enough to receive (what it says),” Winfrey explained.

Asked if she would mail a copy to the White House, Winfrey sounded surprised and said she hadn't planned on it.

“Who’s going to read it there?” she wondered.

Winfrey has had an eventful 2020 from the start. Her book club choice in January, Jeanine Cummins’ novel “American Dirt,” set off a debate about the representation of Latinos in the literary world that also touched upon the relatively few Latino authors Winfrey has selected for the club. Last week, she announced that O would become primarily a digital publication in 2021, though she says the magazine remains profitable.

“Like with all magazines, the ad sales numbers have gone down, but it was still making money,” said Winfrey, who called the focus on digital a natural evolution and one that allows O to present work in a more timely way.

She still hopes to feature more works by Latinos in her club, but for now she wants to “focus on social justice and see where that carries” her. Winfrey said she was in tears when she called Wilkerson to tell her she had chosen “Caste,” and she became emotional during her interview as she discussed putting Taylor’s picture on the cover of O.

“If I could, I would be in the streets, holding up her picture,” she said.



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Exhibit 30

Section f

Q. & A.

GOOGLE'S CASTE-BIAS PROBLEM

*A talk about bigotry was cancelled amid accusations of reverse discrimination.
Whom was the company trying to protect?*



By Isaac Chotiner

August 11, 2022





Until recently, Tanuja Gupta was a senior manager at Google News. She was involved in various forms of activism at the company, and, in April, she invited Thenmozhi Soundararajan, the founder of Equality Labs, a nonprofit, to speak about the subject of caste discrimination. (India's caste system, which has existed in some form for centuries, separates Hindus into broadly hierarchical groups that often correspond to historical religious practice and familial professions. Those at the bottom of the system are called Dalits—formerly known as “untouchables”—and still face extreme discrimination in India.)

Numerous employees within the company expressed the view that any talk on caste discrimination was offensive to them as Hindus, and made them feel unsafe. The talk was eventually cancelled, and Gupta, who had been at Google for more than ten years, resigned amid an investigation into her own behavior. (A spokesperson for Google said that it has “a very clear, publicly shared policy against retaliation and discrimination in our workplace.”)

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I recently spoke with Gupta. Her lawyer, Cara Greene, joined the conversation, which we agreed would stay on the record. During the interview, which has been edited for length and clarity, we discussed how Silicon Valley deals with issues of caste discrimination, why Google employees felt “threatened” by the talk that Gupta had scheduled, and the circumstances behind her departure from the company.

Why did you want to join Google, and what did you feel about the place when you did?

TANUJA GUPTA: I started working at Google in 2011. I had been working as a program manager in engineering and software for about a decade, but Google was top of the top. Of course you want a career at a great company. That was a product that I used day in and day out. It was a great opportunity.

When did you decide that you wanted to get involved with activism inside Google?

T.G.: Probably with the Google walkout in 2018. It was the height of the MeToo movement. The Kavanaugh confirmation was happening. The news about Andy Rubin had broken—the ninety-million-dollar payout that he received despite allegations of sexual misconduct. And so I think there was a little bit of a breaking point within the company, and in myself, the experiences that I’d had in tech. That’s when it started.

As we’ve all grown during the past couple of years, diversity, equity, and inclusion [D.E.I.] has become more and more recognized as not just a moral nicety but actually as a business imperative, that companies have a competency around these matters, especially in products. For the past three years, I was working on Google News products. To be able to cover news topics about matters of race, gender equity, caste, things like that, you actually have to be able to understand matters of

diversity and inclusion. And so it went from being a separate, side thing to integral to being good at your core job.

What got you interested in the subject of caste discrimination?

T.G.: There was my own obvious background. My parents immigrated from India in the early nineteen-eighties. I was certainly familiar with the topic. In September, 2021, two employees approached me. I hosted D.E.I. office hours every week where people could come in and talk about these topics, confidentially, and multiple Google employees came into my office and reported that they had faced discrimination when trying to talk about matters of caste in the workplace. There was already a public condemnation of caste discrimination at Google from the Alphabet workers' union. They had put out a press statement when the Cisco case broke. There were reports from at least twenty Google employees as well. [*In June, 2020, California sued Cisco and two of its managers for engaging in caste discrimination. Afterward, Equality Labs received complaints from more than two hundred and fifty tech workers, including twenty Google employees.*]

What made it really relevant to Google News was that, in 2022, there was a huge election in India where matters of caste equity were integral. Given the news-product footprint in India, caste is absolutely something we need to talk about, and we need to make sure that our products are thinking about folks from different caste backgrounds.

You're talking about the election earlier this year, in Uttar Pradesh, which is the most populous state in India, with more than two hundred million people, where a very right-wing politician, aligned with the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party, was reelected as chief minister. [*The B.J.P, led by India's Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, is known for its defenses of Hindu identity and religious chauvinism; its base of support has typically come from privileged-caste Hindus, although under Modi the Party has made inroads among voters from a variety of*

castes.] Are you saying that to understand these issues of caste was important for your work, and not just for the inner harmony of your workplace?

T.G.: That's right. It was a perfect storm of all these things—colleagues coming to me as well as our products being affected by it.

And were these colleagues coming to you in India or in the United States or both?

T.G.: Both.

Were these people who were experiencing discrimination firsthand, or was it more people who wanted to talk about this issue and why it's important?

T.G.: The first conversations I had were with people who felt that they were being discriminated against for even raising this topic. I think that's a form of discrimination in and of itself—where you can talk about some matters related to D.E.I. but not others. Then you had some other folks who faced it directly because of being caste oppressed.

When you say that people felt that they could not bring up caste discrimination, was this in the context of stories about what was happening in Uttar Pradesh, or things within the workplace, or both?

T.G.: Within the workplace.

Who was the discrimination coming from, and how did it manifest?

T.G.: I can share what I've seen and what's been shared with me. The first thing is denial. Saying this doesn't even exist. That is a form of discrimination. There were messages on e-mail threads that talked about how this isn't a problem here. If you replace the denial of caste discrimination with the denial of the Holocaust or something like that, it instantly clicks where other people start to realize, "Oh, something's wrong if people are denying this." The second thing—and I think the

Cisco case is probably the most publicly known example—is that, within a team, when you’ve got people who are caste privileged and caste oppressed, the people who are caste oppressed start to be given inferior assignments, get treated differently, left out of meetings, which are certainly things that I heard from Google employees within the company. [*The Google spokesperson said that caste discrimination has “no place in our workplace and it’s prohibited in our policies.”*] Another thing is these coded conversations. If you’re not attuned to what the issue is, you won’t even realize what’s happening. Asking things like “What’s your last name? I’m not familiar with it.” Then, when the manager hears that last name, they’re, like, “Oh, so you’re from this caste—no wonder you have these leadership skills.” Things like that. And somebody else in the room is, like, “What the hell?” It’s those different types of experiences that I’ve seen or that have been shared with me that show that caste discrimination is happening in the workplace.

Are you saying that in the United States this discrimination is coming from other Indian Americans? This is not to say that white people or Hispanic people or Black people or whoever else can’t perpetrate caste discrimination. But I think a lot of people who aren’t aware of the caste system or do not recognize someone’s name or what that might suggest about their caste would say, “How could I discriminate about caste? I don’t even know anything about caste.”

T.G.: I don’t fault people for not knowing the intricacies of caste discrimination. I fault people for not wanting to learn about it. Willfully not wanting to learn more about certain topics when you hear that people are being discriminated against, choosing not to do anything about it, that is a problem. And that’s what was happening. People can absolutely discriminate based on caste by essentially denying it and not wanting to learn about it.

In other words, there is first-order discrimination by Indian Americans toward people from underprivileged castes. And then when this gets kicked up the chain of command or gets commented upon, people of varying backgrounds

practice their own form of discrimination by not looking into it or not wanting to hear about it.

T.G.: That's exactly right.

So, you are hearing these stories. What happens next?

T.G.: We asked a speaker to come talk to our news team about matters of caste and discrimination, and specifically caste representation in the newsroom. Two days before the talk, which is part of a larger D.E.I. programming series that I ran for the team, a number of e-mails got sent to my V.P., to the head of H.R., to our chief diversity officer, to our C.E.O. directly, claiming that the talk was creating a hostile workplace, that people felt unsafe, that the speaker was not qualified to speak on the topic, and several other allegations. The talk got postponed. That was the term that was used.

Who was sending these e-mails?

T.G.: They were all internal Google employees. That's about as much as I can say. Google essentially decides to turn down the temperature by postponing the talk and conduct further due diligence on this speaker. Bear in mind that, just five months earlier, this speaker had spoken at Cloud Next, which is a huge event for Google Cloud.

Then nothing happened for two weeks. There was no follow-up on the due diligence, or what made the speaker objectionable in the first place. I told Google that they'd been given some misinformation, and explained why it wasn't true, and got nothing. At that point, Dalit History Month, which is in April, was about to end.

Do you want to say what Dalit means?

#982
T.G.: Dalit is a term that means “broken,” or “untouchable.” It refers to folks at the bottom or outside of the caste system who have been relegated to perform the dirtiest jobs because they are considered spiritually polluted. It comes from a millennia-old system that has religious roots. There has been a cultural and societal impact on millions of South Asians in America, and across the globe, who have faced tremendous setbacks, particularly gender-based violence, but also when it comes to owning land or homes, or finding economic and educational opportunities.

The reason it was important to do the event in April is that the speaker is the founder of Dalit History Month. We were at a point where nothing was being done; it was just silence. At that point, there is no difference between a postponement and a cancellation. In April, we started a petition internally to raise awareness about the lack of action. We got four hundred signatures overnight, and a lot of people actually started to learn about caste, which was the whole point of this talk in the first place. H.R. then informed me that I had violated Google’s standards of conduct, claiming that I publicly criticized Googlers for raising concerns to leadership about the harm and risk they felt from the talk. I should have also mentioned that, during the process of these escalations and concerns, my direct employee got doxed. Her personal information was put on Twitter. The content of the tweet was her e-mail invitation to the Google News team to join this talk on caste equity.

Then I got put under investigation. So I’ve got three things happening at once. I’m trying to run this investigation with our security team to figure out who doxed my direct employee. I’m answering questions because I’m under investigation. And I’m still trying to keep the train moving on actually holding a caste-equity talk and getting the speaker cleared. In May, a number of conversations started to happen where it became clear that there were no universal standards for actually bringing speakers into the company. There was no way to actually get approval for a speaker on caste equity. [*The Google spokesperson told The New Yorker, “We made*

the decision not to move forward with this proposed talk which was pulling employees apart rather than bringing our community together and raising awareness.”]

Then I got issued a warning letter saying that I had violated these standards of conduct and that I was going to be penalized for showing a lack of good judgment, for disrupting the workplace, and for making people feel unsafe because I publicly outed them, even though I never, ever publicly named the Google employees who complained. My ratings were going to be lowered, and my compensation would be affected.

There was also an e-mail group within Google with around eight thousand employees of South Asian descent. What exactly was that forum?

T.G.: Eight thousand is a number that was tallied up from the different Google groups or aliases. We have internally moderated forums. Some forums are specific to groups—Hindus at Google, or Desis at Google, things like that. It’s a mix of them. My initial e-mail started getting forwarded to different forums, and then you could just see these e-mail threads spawn. I wasn’t engaging with any of them, but I saw conversations in which people were denying that caste discrimination was ever a thing, were saying that people weren’t smart enough to understand this topic, all these different kinds of allegations.

Did you have any conversations with fellow-employees who were opposed to this talk?

T.G.: No. At that point, the whole H.R. machine had kicked in, so I couldn’t engage with any of these conversations for risk of being seen as retaliatory.

I think Americans have a pretty clear idea of who at a company might object to a conversation about the way law enforcement treats African Americans, and who would say “All lives matter,” or something like that. They would have an idea of politically where those people were coming from. What do you think was going on here?

T.G.: I think it's probably a couple of things combined. There's certainly the nationalist political movement that is well documented across the board, and the emboldening of that movement with the current leadership [in India]. Apart from that political side, any time you talk about a topic that's going to threaten your own power you're going to get some resistance. To your point of comparing it to talking about police brutality and racism in America, I think that's exactly what we're seeing here. Caste is just a different concept than we're used to in America. We understand race, we understand religion, but caste is neither of those things fully. That's where I think the lack of understanding is happening right now.

The right-wing Hindu movement in India has historically not been associated with people from underprivileged castes, and those people have generally been less supportive of the movement. Much of the criticism of the ruling party in India and talk of caste discrimination has been chalked up to "anti-Hinduism."

T.G.: It's so absurd to me. If you think about L.G.B.T.Q. rights, when you have a talk about those kinds of rights, that is not saying you're inherently anti-Christian. They're so different. That's the only way I can think to explain it to someone here. The opposite of caste is not religion.

That's where things have gotten really conflated. This was a talk about civil rights and the cultural and socioeconomic impact of caste discrimination on people in America, and how this system has moved here. That's what we were trying to talk about, but, when you have people who are threatened by that conversation, because they associate caste discrimination with religion, with that kind of power, that's where a lot of the conflicts came in.

One of the things that strike me as ironic here is that the language from those opposed to the talk is not unfamiliar. You can imagine, in another context, people who support D.E.I. efforts saying that, if people who are Hindu feel offended by this talk or feel that it's an attack on their religion, that is a really important thing to protect. Is there a tension there?

T.G.: You don't get to claim or hijack one form of discrimination to perpetuate another form. I had many personal friends who I could talk to about this who were, like, "I am Hindu, I am Brahmin, and I am deeply disturbed with how Hinduism is being used to perpetuate caste discrimination." I don't want to say that this is a monolithic thing, how Hindus feel about this. That's not at all what I'm saying. I'm half-Hindu. You can absolutely have a conversation about caste discrimination and know that there may be religious roots in some of it, but that's not where we are today. We are talking about a socioeconomic issue. That's how you can hold the two things in your brain together. Does that answer your question?

If there were a talk scheduled at a large company and a number of employees at the talk said that they felt that it was offensive to their religion, which was not a majority religion in the United States, a lot of people would be sympathetic to that and think that they should listen to those people. In this case, I happen to think that's ridiculous, just like I think it's ridiculous to say that people who critique Modi are advancing an anti-Hindu agenda, but, in the current moment, one which D.E.I. has played a role in creating, I understand why people's attitude is, "Whoa, we've got to listen to these people who say that this talk is offensive to their religion."

T.G.: This is where we have to talk about what's "offensive" versus real harm. The real harm is when people are denied a voice, when they cannot speak about their own working conditions and the harm that they have faced socioeconomically. That is real harm compared with being offended because your own power is threatened and you're feeling a little bit more fragile but you can't point to actual harm that's been done to you. The only people that got really harmed in this were all the people who are caste oppressed, who essentially are now feeling even more worried about being outed and have had their discrimination ignored. And my direct employee who got doxed. Those are the people that are really harmed.

A lot of tech companies, Twitter most recently, have been engaged in squabbles with the Indian government about matters of free speech. Did you have any sense that people in Google were concerned about pissing off the Indian government in some way?

CARA GREENE: I'm just going to jump in. I don't think Tanuja is in a position really to speak about Google and what they were thinking in that situation or what was driving their concerns beyond what was expressed to her.

Without focussing on this situation, is that something that you think that tech companies like Google are generally worried or concerned about? India right now is undergoing some very fast changes, and press freedom has been declining. Was that something that was on your mind, or your employees' minds?

T.G.: I would be hesitant to try to speak to what could or couldn't have been on their minds. I do know that we have a very large footprint in India, both in consumers and workers.

How did your departure from Google occur?

T.G.: When I got that conduct warning letter, it was kind of game over. My career was over, but the terms of the letter were still vague and I never got any answers to the questions that I posed. It was just clear from that letter that they wanted me gone. I decided that I needed to leave the company and make sure that my team was in as good a shape as possible. That was the last two weeks of May. At that point, I was still trying to have a talk on caste equity, to see if we could have something within Asian Heritage Month. But, because we had no clear vetting standards, some of the other speakers we considered were, like, "Why would we go through this? Why would we come speak after what has happened?"

Do you think Google is an outlier in terms of caste issues in Silicon Valley?

T.G.: This is not unique to Google. This is happening across tech because of the large number of South Asian employees. What I do think is unique to Google is the fact that they shut this talk down. This speaker, Soundararajan, has spoken at a number of other companies in Silicon Valley. For Google to not really have the cultural competence of understanding what was happening and to cancel the talk is what's surprising. That's really unfortunate because they can set a precedent for what's going to happen at some of these other locations.

Since you left the company, are there things you're not allowed to say legally or subjects you're not allowed to discuss?

C.G.: Google requires of its employees a pretty extensive nondisclosure agreement that really limits what they can talk about with respect to their employment at Google. Luckily, and thankfully, California, among other places, passed the Silence No More Act, which allows Tanuja to speak freely about the discrimination and retaliation that she experienced and observed in the workplace. But that nondisclosure agreement does curtail employees and former employees from being able to speak freely about what they observed in the workplace.

T.G.: I'll answer your question the way I can. First of all, I'm glad that you even asked because it's been really frustrating to see some of the press coverage that said that I just left the company or resigned over the incident like it was an ultimatum. It wasn't. There was this whole other thing where I was facing retaliation for reporting it in the first place. When I left, I filed a request for an investigation into retaliation and creating a safe workplace for caste-oppressed individuals.

Out of respect for the time that Alphabet has requested to conduct that investigation, I haven't spoken publicly until now. At this point, we're some percent of the way through what looks like a pretty classic kind of deny, delay, distract cycle.

This is seen across different companies and across different topics. I've had a number of women of color who have reached out to me saying, "Hey, I've had similar experiences working on D.E.I. at my company," or even within Google as well. And what is the safe way to do this work?

Yeah, you had a striking line in your goodbye letter saying that this work tends to fall on women.

T.G.: Yeah, because women, especially women of color, are disproportionately affected by a lot of these matters, they're often the group that has the most scholarship and experience to address them. You then have the burden of also educating your colleagues, counselling them through these kinds of topics, and then leading the charge as well. But you only have credibility to do those things if you're also really good at your other jobs where you're useful to the company. You end up taking on a double amount of work, but you want to do it because it's the right thing to do. And then, the moment that you kind of go out of your place, you get retaliated against. ♦

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Exhibit 30

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CALIFORNIA

Hindu nationalism in India ratchets up tensions among immigrants in the U.S.



Orange County resident Waqas Syed said recent conflicts between Indian Americans in Anaheim and New Jersey were a new low. (Irfan Khan / Los Angeles Times)



BY JEONG PARK

STAFF WRITER |  FOLLOW

SEPT. 6, 2022 5 AM PT



In a park in Anaheim last month, hundreds gathered to celebrate Indian Independence Day.

They bought Indian food from booths and settled on the grass to watch traditional song and dance performances. The holiday had special significance this year: Aug. 15 was [the 75th anniversary of the end of British rule](#).

Then, about a dozen people, most of whom were Indian American, marched silently past the crowd, carrying signs that read “Abolish caste” and “Protect India’s Muslim lives.”

A few men from the independence celebration charged at the protesters, grabbing the signs, breaking them and throwing them into trash cans. Some shouted obscenities in Hindi-Urdu. They called the protesters “stupid Muslims” and yelled at them to “get out of here.”

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Through a microphone, an announcer led a chant: “*Bharat Mata ki jai*” — “Victory for Mother India.”

“We are Indian,” Rita Kaur, a protester who is Sikh and was born and raised in Southern California, said later. “We are simply speaking for Indians who are harmed relentlessly.”

Happening now: A verbal confrontation between those protesting caste discrimination and violence against Muslims in India and the crowd at the

Indian Independence Day in La Palma Park in Anaheim. (Some explicit language included) pic.twitter.com/PoYxgeIrwf

— Jeong Park 박종찬 (@JeongPark52) August 15, 2022

Indian Independence Day means vastly different things to different people in a country shaped by religious and ethnic conflicts, as well as caste discrimination.

For many of the majority Hindu religion, the day represents the end of colonialism and the birth of India as an independent nation that became the world's largest democracy.

For many Muslims and other minorities, it represents the bloody partition of the former British colony into India and Pakistan and the persecution of non-Hindus and lower castes.



Activists burn an effigy of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Jan. 11, 2020, in Kolkata, India. (Bikas Das / Associated Press)

Since Narendra Modi became prime minister of India in 2014, [his naked appeals to patriotism and his party's frequent scapegoating of minorities](#), especially Muslims, have resonated with some who believe he has made the country stronger and safer. Meanwhile, religious minorities, especially Muslims, have faced [mob attacks](#) from Hindu vigilante groups.



WORLD & NATION

Narendra Modi's landslide reelection in India is another win for religious nationalism

May 23, 2019

Those conflicts have sometimes spilled over into Indian communities in the United States.

An Indian Independence Day parade last month in Edison, N.J., featured a bulldozer with a photo of Modi — a provocative symbol when local officials in India have used bulldozers to [demolish the homes of Muslims](#). [Parade organizers later apologized](#).

In Silicon Valley, discrimination against people from the Dalit caste surfaced in a lawsuit filed in 2020 by California officials on behalf of an engineer at Cisco Systems who alleged that higher-caste supervisors [gave him lower pay and fewer opportunities](#). At Google this year, [a talk about caste equity was canceled](#) after some employees accused the speaker of being anti-Hindu.

“This poison of sectarian hatred has been getting more widespread,” said Rohit Chopra, a communications professor at Santa Clara University who [has long been critical of Modi and his supporters for promoting Hindu nationalism](#). “That same pattern of increasing aggression and impunity seems to have replicated itself in the diaspora.”

Organizers of the Anaheim Independence Day celebration did not respond to requests for comment. [In a statement to NBC Asian America](#), organizer Manoj Agrawal said the

event was “not religion-biased” and included many Muslim vendors.

Agrawal said the protesters intended “to create trouble and then record something which can help them to showcase something.”

The Hindu American Foundation, a nonprofit advocacy group, defended the Independence Day organizers. The protesters were seeking to “disrupt children performing on stage inside the event,” the group’s managing director, Samir Kalra, said in a statement.

For the record:

2:44 p.m. Sept. 6, 2022 *An earlier version of this story said that members of the Coalition for Democracy and Secularism in India organized a protest at an Indian Independence Day event in Anaheim. The coalition has organized similar protests but did not organize the Anaheim one.*

Orange County resident Waqas Syed, a member of the Coalition for Democracy and Secularism in India, said it is common for protesters against caste and religious discrimination to be harassed.

But Syed, who is also a director of Justice America, which focuses on Indian issues in the U.S., said the conflicts in Anaheim and New Jersey were a new low.

“Just five years ago, this event that you witnessed a couple of weeks ago would never have happened. [Since the growth of Hindutva in all areas](#), this has become possible, and this is going to happen in much more areas,” he said, using a term for Hindu nationalism.



WORLD & NATION

Back Story: Why India's rape crisis is getting worse under Narendra Modi

April 21, 2018

[In a recent column in IndiaWest Journal](#), Shakeel Syed explained why he refuses to celebrate Indian Independence Day.

Syed, executive director of the South Asian Network in Artesia, has fond memories of growing up in India and is grateful for the values he learned in a relatively secular society. But that India no longer exists, he wrote.

“The value of ‘fellowship’ that I learned from my teachers, neighbors, and friends (irrespective of their religion and ethnicity) nurtured a shared spirit of decency, mutual respect, and unconditional love for each other and the greater good,” Syed, who is Muslim and left India 40 years ago, wrote. “Today’s India is obliterating ... fellowship with bigotry, fanaticism, xenophobia, and intolerance, organized and institutionalized by the State.”



Zameer Batta, 52, a local businessman of Indian origin, said he does not agree with how India treats its Muslim citizens. He hopes that marriages between Hindus and Muslims can bring communities together. (Irfan Khan / Los Angeles Times)

In Artesia's Little India, Zameer Batta said he does not agree with how India treats its Muslim citizens. He shrugged when informed of the events in Anaheim and New Jersey.

"I don't agree with the treatment, but what can I do?" Batta, 52, said as he ate a lunch of lentils and vegetarian thali.

Batta, who is Muslim and of Indian origin, grew up in Uganda. He hopes that marriages between Hindus and Muslims, as well as the rise of Muslim Bollywood actors, can bring communities together.

Dimpel Gandhi, a 40-year-old beauty salon worker who came from India 20 years ago, said "regular people" and the "new generation" are not thinking about religious

tensions. In India, her family lives next to a Muslim family, and “they are always together,” she said.

Asked what she thought of the recent conflicts among Indian Americans in the U.S., she said, “Everyone is good. Everyone should respect.”

Then she fell silent, shaking her head.

Times staff writer Suhauna Hussain and staff photographer Irfan Khan contributed to this report.

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Exhibit 30

Section h

With Stories of Her Oppressed Community, a Journalist Takes Aim at the Walls of Caste

Meena Kotwal started a news outlet focused on Dalit and other marginalized groups in India, hoping that telling their stories would help improve their lives.



By Karan Deep Singh

Karan Deep Singh reported this story from New Delhi and Bihar, India.

March 6, 2023

The injustices were all too common. In one part of India, a vendor's stall was broken up, depriving him of his livelihood. In another, members of a poor family were denied government benefits, forcing them to beg for survival. They were all Dalits, once deemed untouchable by India's hierarchical caste system.

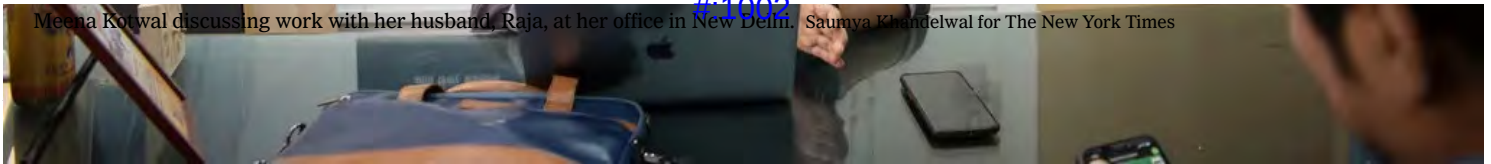
Such episodes have gone largely unnoted and unaddressed for decades. But both cases were picked up by an online news outlet that was started two years ago with the mission of covering marginalized groups in India. Afterward, officials began taking action.

"That's the impact of giving voice to the voiceless," said Meena Kotwal, the outlet's founder.

Even as members of marginalized groups have risen to become presidents of India (a largely ceremonial post), the country's close to 300 million Dalits still face widespread mistreatment and violence. Despite decades of constitutionally enshrined protections and affirmative action, every year thousands are subjected to crimes, including rape, torture, acid attacks and murder.

To tell these stories and right these wrongs, Ms. Kotwal, a Dalit herself, started The Mooknayak — or "the leader of the voiceless." It is named after a biweekly newspaper founded more than a century ago by Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar, whom scholars have sometimes compared to Martin Luther King Jr. He helped draft the nation's Constitution, which enshrined a formal ban on caste discrimination.





The Hindu nationalist party of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the Bharatiya Janata Party, has courted and increasingly drawn a bigger share of the Dalit vote. But it has done little to persuade the religious ideologues among its support base to let go of a centuries-old Hindu social order that relegated Dalits to the most undesirable tasks like cleaning toilets, skinning animals and disposing of dead bodies.

Ms. Kotwal had no business plan for The Mooknayak, but she knew there were millions who desperately needed their stories told. She hired Dalits, Indigenous people and women as reporters, editors and video journalists. Publishing articles and videos in Hindi and English, they aspire to cover everything from individual injustices to policy debates.

“I want the marginalized community to be able to say, ‘We have our own media, we report on all kinds of stories and we raise issues that haven’t been raised until today,’” said Ms. Kotwal, 33.

The Mooknayak’s audience has grown steadily and now draws nearly 50,000 unique visitors a month to its website. It runs on crowdfunding — readers have donated phones, small amounts of money, even a motorbike — and grants. The Mooknayak has received more than \$12,000 from Google and roughly \$6,000 as part of a training program led by YouTube, which helped fund salaries for a team of 11, as well as to pay for a teleprompter and office furniture.

Its growing influence allowed Ms. Kotwal to nab an interview with Rahul Gandhi, scion of a once-mighty political dynasty who is seeking to challenge Mr. Modi in next year’s election. Her rising public profile, though, has also brought her multiple rape and death threats.

Even making it this far as a Dalit woman is a victory in India’s caste-ridden society. Born to manual laborers, Ms. Kotwal grew up in a Dalit neighborhood in New Delhi. Before leaving for school each morning, she stuffed her notebooks in a jute sack, which she also used as a seat on the ground. Her family’s meager earnings meant that as a 16-year-old she needed to work to pay for both her education and her personal needs.



Ambedkar Nagar, where Ms. Kotwal lives, in New Delhi. Saumya Khandelwal for The New York Times

Soon she was pursuing a degree in journalism, a path where she had few role models from her community, which still faces rampant employment discrimination.

But her persistence paid off in 2017, when Ms. Kotwal strode across the Italian marble floor of a tower in New Delhi and started work as a broadcast journalist for the BBC's Hindi-language service. The job and its trappings left her and her family in awe. "Do you sit in a swivel chair? Are you served tea at your seat?" her mother, an illiterate laborer, asked.

The honeymoon did not last long. A dominant-caste colleague nudged Ms. Kotwal to reveal her own caste, she said, and then outed her to colleagues. It was the beginning of what she described as public humiliation and discrimination at work.

Her bosses brushed off her concerns. One used a refrain often heard from people of dominant castes, telling her that Dalits no longer existed in modern India, according to messages viewed by The Times — denying not just her complaint, but her community's very existence.



Ms. Kotwal's BBC badge at her parents' home in New Delhi, in 2021. Karan Deep Singh/The New York Times

After two years on the job, she filed an official complaint with BBC officials in London. The company reviewed her claims of discrimination, according to an internal document, but ruled that her grievances were without “merit or substance.” Her contract, due to end soon, was not renewed.

The BBC said it does not discuss individual personnel matters and fully complies with Indian law. A London-based spokeswoman added, “We know there is always more to do in a global organization, but we are making significant progress in terms of the diversity of the people who work with us.”

The representation of Dalits and other marginalized peoples remains an issue across nearly every profession in India. That is especially true in the country’s media industry, which is dominated by privileged castes who tend to hire people from similar backgrounds. Surveys show almost 90 percent of the country’s top news media figures belong to dominant Hindu castes.

The “almost complete absence” of Dalit journalists, writers and television personalities in the Indian media, said Harish Wankhede, a professor at the Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi who studies caste in media, creates “a black hole of gatekeeping” in which articles highlighting crimes against Dalits are routinely buried.

The New York Times interviewed more than a dozen journalists belonging to historically marginalized communities, including Ms. Kotwal, who said they had experienced discrimination from colleagues. Several other journalists corroborated their accounts.



Ms. Kotwal uses a motor scooter for her reporting trips and for commuting. Saumya Khandelwal for The New York Times

Dalit journalists at India's mainstream newspapers and television stations said that though they felt obliged to hide their caste identities at work, they were sometimes asked about it during job interviews. Some said they had experienced forms of discrimination and shunning — one, for instance, said dominant-caste co-workers refused to eat food he had touched.

“It's like carrying this shameful, dirty secret, you know, and you know they'll never accept you,” said Yashica Dutt, the author of “Coming Out as Dalit,” who kept her Dalit identity hidden for 10 years as a journalist in India before moving to New York.

On a chilly January afternoon, Ms. Kotwal unrolled the shutters to her new office in New Delhi. She flicked a single switch and walked past chairs still covered in plastic to a room with a large wooden desk.

“Welcome to our newsroom,” said Ms. Kotwal, who envisions her platform as a means to bring social change. “I want someone in a village to get drinking water, or help get their F.I.R. registered,” she said, referring to the first information report, the vital but often-daunting step of lodging a formal police complaint in India.



Meena Kotwal, eating lunch with Dharaa, her daughter, at home in New Delhi. Saumya Khandelwal for The New York Times

Soon after losing the BBC job, Ms. Kotwal gave birth to her daughter, Dharaa, now a demanding toddler who travels with her on reporting trips and scooter rides to her office. Ms. Kotwal called her daughter her biggest inspiration for her work.

“I keep thinking, ‘What will happen to her as a Dalit woman one day?’ She would ask me, ‘What did you do, Mummy?’”

Exhibit 30

Section i

Why a Journal on Caste?

Part I. An Introduction to the Journal: Laurence Simon

Our journal is founded on the straightforward principle that social exclusion should not be a consequence of one's birth or ancestry. Caste, in its simplest definition, encompasses all hereditary systems and derived cultures that constrain the fullest human development, acceptance and recognition of equal rights for each and every individual. Yet history is rife with 'natural' hierarchies that have their own, often religious, justifications for quasi-biological groupings based on inherited privilege or stigma. Rawls considers this backdrop to modern theories of justice.

Thus, in a feudal or in a caste system each person is believed to have his allotted station in the natural order of things. His comparisons are presumably confined within his own estate or caste, these ranks becoming in effect so many non-comparing groups established independently of human control and sanctioned by religion and theology. Men resign themselves to their position should it ever occur to them to question it; and since all may view themselves as assigned their vocation, everyone is held to be equally fated and equally noble in the eyes of providence.¹

In the West, these archaic notions of a fixed and ordained society were derived in part from the Ptolemaic conception of the universe with the earth, man, kings, and aristocracy as the center of God's creation. These were eventually challenged by the emergence of science and rational inquiry. Even in the modern era illusions of superiority were common among early settlers to the Americas. The indigenous peoples of North and South America were eliminated through genocide with their survivors marched through the trail of tears. The English word caste derives from the Latin *castus* denoting being cut off or separated, and the Portuguese *casta* carried that further into purity of lineage, race, or breed thus separating the colonial Portuguese from the indigenous and mixed races of Brazil.

This concept of purity can poison cultures and create pseudospeciation, a term first used by the American psychologist Eric Ericson to describe marginalized groups considered so inferior that they have become in the eyes of the oppressor distinct and subpar species. We only have to think of the Europeans' exploitation of the African slave, or blacks in apartheid states of Africa, or the Jews of Imperial Russia who were confined to the Pale of Settlement, limited to Jewish quotas for education and suffering the collective violence of pogroms against their communities. Western history is littered with such dehumanization and their legacies are still palpable in contemporary societies.

¹John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1971) p. 547.

Asia was the cradle of some of the world's major faiths yet, today in the name of those religions, pogroms are led against religious outsiders in Sri Lanka and Myanmar, and in India. This tragedy of a moral and spiritual corruption has sustained the oldest form of prejudice in the world today: the division of society into rigid, birth-based graded hierarchy of caste. While progress toward social equality has been made, the birth-based caste system has survived millennia and continues to hinder the lives of millions of low-caste and tribal citizens. It remains a leading cause of horrendous acts of violence, including gang rape and lynching, or honor killings for inter-caste romances. It results in suicides on Indian campuses, bias in employment and housing, and a staggering waste of human potential. Despite reformist movements and affirmative action policies, and even after legal protections, the stigma of untouchability still exists in a culture derived from ancient scriptures.

Our journal then intends to encourage and publish scholarship on both the broader experience of caste throughout the world and on the ancient caste system as it still thrives in South Asia. Our articles are carefully peer-reviewed and submitted by scholars from all disciplines in the academy. I heard someone at a conference recently say that scholarship does not matter, that social action does. Yet universities are enormously influential in much of the world and their teachings through curricula expand or constrain the reasoning and reflections of future generations. At heart J-CASTE is a journal about ethics and about moral philosophy. These are the purposeful underpinnings of our perspective. This perspective is deeply rooted at Brandeis, a top-tier research university founded on the principle of social inclusion, and which has recently become perhaps the first in the United States to incorporate caste into its non-discrimination policy.

Part 2. An Introduction to Caste: Sukhadeo Thorat

This being the first issue of J-CASTE, we think it appropriate to introduce the caste system to readers. It is an ancient organisation of the Hindu that involves the division of the Hindu society into five groups called castes. The origin of caste system goes back to around second century BCE when it was legally codified in *Manusmriti*.² The system laid down a legal and normative framework to govern all aspects of the society: cultural, economic, religious, spiritual, and political. The moral and legal framework assigned right to property, occupation, education and civil and religious right among the castes. But the assignment and entailment to rights was made in a graded and unequal manner. The caste at the top of hierarchy had most rights and privileges that kept on reducing gradually in descending order of the caste. Further, rights of each of the five castes were fixed in advance and made hereditary by birth. An equally important feature is that each caste is isolated and separated through the rule of endogamy (or marriage within one's caste). Endogamy enforced isolation and social separation of castes from each other and restricted social relations between them. The caste at the bottom of the hierarchy was regarded as 'impure and polluting,' thus 'untouchable' or unfit for any social interaction except among them. Also, they were assigned all the menial tasks of cleaning, scavenging, skinning carcasses, and so on – a stigma associated with them to this day. Traditionally, this caste has had no right

²An ancient Hindu scripture in which social laws were codified.

to property, education, and civic rights, except obligatory services to the four castes above them. Thus, the 'untouchables,' or *atishudras in Sanskrit*, suffer forced isolation and segregation in virtually all spheres of life. The denial of basic rights, fundamental for the social growth of a human being has had a crippling effect on their psyche from which they have not recovered for many centuries. Thus, caste as a social organisation is governed by the unequal assignment or entitlement of rights, lack of individual freedom, and fraternity: the very antithesis of a fair and just system of governance. This has resulted in deep inter-caste inequalities in all aspects of life.

Constitution, Laws and Policies

The Indian State at the time of framing Constitution in 1950 recognised the problem arising out of its social organisation of caste system. It made social justice (social, economic and political), liberty, equality, and fraternity the governing principles of the society, overturning the principles on which caste system was founded. The Constitution promises equal rights to all citizens as fundamental rights. Article 14 assures equality before the law and equal protection of law. Article 15 prohibits discrimination on the grounds of caste, religion, race, sex, or place of birth, by the State and in use of services supplied by private individual for public use, and /or facilities maintained wholly or partly out of State funds and dedicated to the use of the general public. Article 16 refers to equality of opportunity in matters of public employment, and states that there shall be equality of opportunity for all citizens in matters relating to employment under the State, and no discrimination in employment or office under the State.

Article 17 abolishes untouchability and its practice in any form is forbidden and made punishable in law. Moreover, the Constitution in Article 46, namely Directive Principles of State Policy, makes it obligatory for the State to enact laws and frame policies to enable the citizens to use these (fundamental) rights in practice thus: 'The State is required to protect the Scheduled Caste (ex-untouchables) and Scheduled Tribes (indigenous people) from social injustices and all forms of exploitation.' In the case of scheduled caste, among other things it means protection in law from caste discrimination and untouchability.

The Indian Government, in 1955, enacted the Untouchability (Offences) Act on May 8, 1955 (enforced on June 1, 1955). It was renamed 'Protection of Civil Rights (PCR) Act, 1979. Thirty-four years later, another law namely 'The Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, was enacted in 1989. The Indian Government also enacted an affirmative action policy to ensure fair share to the scheduled castes/scheduled tribes in legislature, public employment and educational institutions.

Similar constitutional, legal provisions and policies were framed in Nepal after the adoption of its new Constitution. Selective policies to secure protection to social minorities, particularly, the scavenger caste have also been adopted in Pakistan and Bangladesh. In UK, after a report on the caste discrimination faced by the Dalits or the scheduled caste in India, the British Government tabled a bill for legal safeguards against caste discrimination, which is pending final approval.

* * *

Persistence of Caste Discrimination and Inequalities

Over a period of time, there has been substantial erosion in the institution of Caste. The situation of the scheduled caste has improved considerably. However, although the caste system has weakened in several spheres, it continues to retain some of its worst features even today. Reference to selected indicators of human development like per capita income, poverty, malnutrition, education, and assets ownership highlight the persisting inter caste inequalities and practice of caste discrimination.

In 2012, the average per capita income (in terms of monthly per capita consumption expenditure at current prices) was Rs 1645 at the all India level. However, it was Rs 2413 for high caste, Rs 1531 for other backward caste or OBC (a lower but not 'ex-untouchable caste'), and Rs 1294 for scheduled castes. The per capita income declines as we move from high caste to other backward castes and to the scheduled caste, indicating the persistence of graded inequality in income.

Similar inequality is observed for incidence of poverty, which increases in descending order of caste hierarchy. As against the poverty ratio of 22 per cent at all India level in 2012, only nine per cent among the high caste are poor, as compared to 20 per cent poor among OBC and 30 per cent for SC. Poverty affects nutrition and health status of the people at the bottom of the caste pyramid. In 2015/16 about 36 per cent of children under the age of five were underweight. The ratio was high with 39 percent for SC, 36 per cent for OBCs and 29 per cent for high caste. Similar graded inequality persists in educational attainment too. In 2014, about 78 per cent of students entered secondary /higher secondary level at the all India level. The enrolment rate was 97 per cent for high caste, followed by 80 per cent for OBC and 73 per cent for SC. The enrolment rate for higher education was 43 per cent for high caste, 29 per cent for backward caste and 20 per cent for SC.

Thus, in case of all indicators of human development, namely per capita consumption expenditure, percentage of poor people, malnutrition, and educational attainment the graded inequality still persists. The low human development of the SC is primarily due to their low ownership of income earning assets, low education and employment, and also due to poor access to markets for employment and other things due to discrimination.

The ownership of wealth is heavily concentrated in the hands of high castes. In 2013, almost 45 per cent of the country's wealth was owned by high caste – almost twice their population share of 21 per cent. The OBCs owned about 31 per cent which is fairly close to their population share of 36 per cent. The SC on the other hand owned only seven per cent of the country's wealth share, much less than their population share of 17 per cent. *The average value of wealth at all India level is Rs 1.5million.* It is Rs 2.9 million for higher caste, followed by Rs 1.3 million for OBC, and just Rs six hundred thousand for SC. The scheduled caste average value of wealth is almost six times less than that of high caste and half of OBC.

Due to lack of access to income earning assets in 2011, about 44 per cent of scheduled caste workers in rural area depended on casual wage labour, compared to 26 per cent for OBC and 11 per cent of high caste dependent on casual labour.

In this discrimination plays its part. In 2011/12, of the total gap in per capita monthly consumption expenditure between the scheduled castes and high caste, about 60 per cent was due to differences in ownership of capital assets (land and enterprises), employment and education, but the rest 40 per cent was due to caste discrimination. The gap was mainly on account of discrimination in wages, employment and occupation. The exercise for 2011/12 indicated that in the wage gap between the SC and high caste about 28.5 per cent was due to discrimination. In case of employment, about 70 per cent was due to employment discrimination. The job discrimination is high in white-collar jobs, particularly in high paid administrative and professional jobs in the private sector.

Finding of a *primary survey* done in 2013 in villages of India, shows that the SC wage labour faces restrictions on hiring and wages, both in regular salaried and casual labour in selected works. The SC business persons engaged in grocery, restaurant/eatery and transport service face discrimination in which their goods on sale and transport services are less used by the high caste affecting their income and profitability. Farmers face discrimination in purchase of inputs. While the access to inputs and employment is fairly open to scheduled caste, they also experience discrimination in many spheres, if not all. This affects the income of the scheduled caste wage workers, farmers, and business persons, resulting in high incidence of poverty among them. While this is the situation in case of economic opportunities, the civil rights sphere is not free from discrimination either despite legal safeguards. The Protection of Civil Right 1955 and Prevention of Atrocities Act 1989 allow the scheduled caste to register a legal complaint for denial of civil rights. However, during the period between 2001 to 2016, a total of 2,57,961 cases of atrocities against the SC were registered, which comes to a yearly average of 16,123 incidences of violation per year.

This very brief account of the status of the scheduled vis-à-vis the higher caste, shows that although there has been some improvement in the condition of SC, yet the caste system has remained a relatively stubborn institution. Although it has weakened in several spheres, it continues to retain some of its worst features.

Caste also shows its presence in other South Asian countries, particularly in Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Pakistan. It is also seen as carry forward effects in the Indian diaspora in the United Kingdom, the United States, East Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean among descendants of Indian migrant populations

Caste relations persist in modified forms with negative consequences particularly for the lower castes that have not been able to shed the stigma in spite of conversions to other religions or integration in foreign societies and cultures. Today, caste system is a global issue.

Part 3. About Vol. I., No. I: The Editors

The first issue of this journal includes papers by scholars from many academic and professional disciplines who have worked on the issue of exclusion and discrimination. It comprises two sets of papers:

The first set comprises contributions by eminent scholars across the globe. These articles cover two types of issues; one related to access to basic needs such as food,

health and housing, and the second related to caste-based atrocities and violence. The article by Nakkeeran et al. is an ethnographic enquiry into the pre-school Supplementary Nutrition Programme in India and attempts to understand the institutional barriers and sociological processes that led to the exclusion of families and children in accessing these essential services. The paper by Sanghmitra Acharya endeavours to understand the determinants of disparity among population groups across countries which influence access to health care with special reference to India. The paper by Vinod Kumar Mishra explores the nature, form, and pattern of discrimination faced by the scheduled castes or ex-untouchables, Muslims, and people from the Northeastern states while seeking rental accommodation in urban India. The exclusionary practices of landlords and brokers expose the dark underbelly of the urban rental housing market and its discouraging impact on the groups which are at the receiving end.

The article by Kalinga Tudor Silva examines how the rival Sinhala and Tamil nationalisms in Sri Lanka have contributed to 'caste blindness', a deliberate neglect of caste discrimination in public policies, while responding to the problem of long-term internally displaced people (IDP) in Jaffna Peninsula more than a decade after the end of war between the Government and separatists of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. The paper by G. C. Pal is based on empirical research on 'mapping caste-based violence' in the contemporary Indian society. The paper sheds light on the diverse consequences of real or perceived violence, emanating from 'caste'. His analysis reveals that the consequences of caste violence are manifested in social, economic, psychological, and moral terms. The paper by Rajesh Sampath, attempts a critical commentary of Ambedkar's posthumously published, incomplete manuscript 'Philosophy of Hinduism'. Sampath attempts to draw out the profound implications of one of Ambedkar's last studies prior to his death, and argues for the centrality of both philosophy, and the philosophy of religion in Ambedkar studies in general.

The second set has articles written by emerging young researchers who have won the prestigious Bluestone Rising Scholars award 2019. There are six papers in this section (including two winners and four honorary mentions). Maya Pramod, winner of the Bluestone award, focuses on the rereading of the social history in Kerala of 'caste colonies', with focus especially on Dalit women. As a member of the oppressed community herself, she finds how the caste colonies serve as the index of their inferior social status, and far from empowering the Dalits, have led to their ghettoisation. The second article by Vivek V. Narayan, winner also of the Bluestone award, analyzes the genealogies of the human in colonial-era Travancore by focusing on three scenes exemplifying performative egalitarianisms: soulful enlightenment, repurposed *Advaita*, and radical *Siddha Saiva*. Both papers are based on Kerala but in different time and context.

The article by Mark E. Balmforth focuses on the underexplored aspect of the interrelationship between caste and slavery in South Asia, and underlines the value of considering South Asian slave narratives as source material into historiography and archivally obscured aspects of dominant caste identity. The paper by Sanobar Umar addresses the interrelated connections between the production of Muslims as 'foreign' and the simultaneous relegation of Muslim 'indigenous' histories of conversion (from Dalit and lower caste backgrounds) to the periphery under ahistoric, demeaning, and monolith stereotypes of the 'backward Musalman.' The article by Subro Saha, explores the contingencies and paradoxes shaping the idealism/materialism separation in absolutist terms and analyzes the problems of such separatist tendencies in dealing

with the question of caste. The article by Sunaina Arya seeks to initiate a theoretical rethinking of feminist as well as Dalit scholarship, with employment of analytical, hermeneutical, and critical methods by exposing flaws about ‘dalit patriarchy’—including a detailed discussion on the empirical, theoretical, and logical shortcomings.

The Forum of the issue has been contributed by eminent economist Jean Drèze who argues that the recent rise of Hindu nationalism in India can be seen as a revolt of the upper castes against the egalitarian demands of democracy. The first issue also incorporated three book reviews on recently published research on caste and social exclusion. And finally, we are honoured to have blessings and best wishes from His Holiness the Dalai Lama who in praising the launch of our journal says that caste “is a vestige of feudalism” and that the journal “can promote a sense of the oneness of the seven billion human beings.”

Exhibit 30

Section j

Maine's Colby College bans discrimination based on caste

October 15, 2021



WATERVILLE, Maine (AP) — Colby College is banning discrimination based on caste, a system of inherited social class, becoming one of the nation’s earliest colleges to do so.

The private liberal arts college revised its nondiscrimination policy to add caste to its list of protections for the campus community.

The efforts were led by a professor who took an interest in caste discrimination across the country and realized the college needed to recognize it as a form of discrimination, [the Bangor Daily News reported](#).

“You have to first name what it is to say: This exists, we name it, we stand against it,” said Sonja Thomas, associate professor and department chair of women’s, gender and sexuality studies at Colby.

While caste is often associated with South Asia, such class-based systems come into play across religions, cultures and countries, and even in technology industries and academia, Thomas said.

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Colby doesn’t have a large student population from South Asia, but it’s increasing the diversity of its student population, so “it’s important that we take a step back, reflect on on the policies that we call upon to promote inclusivity and safeguard members of the community,” said Tayo Clyburn, dean of diversity, equity and inclusion.

Colby College’s updated policy, announced this week, follows one at Brandeis University in Massachusetts, which declared in late 2019 that it would prohibit caste discrimination on its campus.

Exhibit 30

Section k

Why the West is reckoning with caste bias now

🕒 28 April 2022



India's constitution and courts have long recognised lower castes and Dalits as historically disadvantaged groups and offered protections in the form of quotas and anti-discriminatory laws.

Now Dalit activists and academics, particularly in the US, are trying to bring in similar recognition in the West, where the Indian diaspora has often strived to be the "model minority" - aspiring, diligent immigrants who assimilate seamlessly into the country.

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Replay

"Ambedkar once quoted, 'If Hindus migrate to other regions on earth, Indian caste would become a world problem.' That is precisely what is happening now in the United States," Rama Krishna Bhupathi of the US-based civil rights group Ambedkar International Center told the BBC.

Dalit activists say that for decades, discrimination practised by upper-caste Indians - especially in universities and technology firms - didn't get attention.



Prem Pariyar, a Nepali-origin academic, said he often used a metaphor from Isabel Wilkerson's book to explain caste in America

The work of activists from marginalised castes and a rise in online "safe" spaces have increased the visibility of this issue in recent years.

The Black Lives Matter protests, which intensified after the killings of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, also had an effect, said Sonja Thomas, an assistant professor who fought for caste protections at Colby College in Maine.

South Asian Americans are now thinking through how anti-Blackness in their own communities might be informed by casteism, she said.

~~investigation against conglomerate Cisco and one of its dominant cases~~
employees of Indian origin for harassment and discrimination against a Dalit co-worker.

"The case gave credibility to the efforts that were already being made in the background," the Ambedkar Association of North America (AANA) told the BBC.

Soon after the Cisco case became public, a hotline set up by Dalit rights organisation Equality Labs received reports of caste-based harassment from more than 250 tech workers in Google, Facebook, Apple and several other companies in Silicon Valley.

The Cisco case received support from the workers' union of Google's parent company, Alphabet.

"It was the first time an American institution outside of our countries of origin recognised caste as a significant civil rights problem and one that required governmental litigation," Thenmozhi Soundararajan, founder of Equality Labs, told the BBC.

In 2021, a **separate federal lawsuit** accused Hindu organisation Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS) of exploiting Dalit workers to build temples across various sites while paying them far less than the minimum wages.



This solidarity from the labour movement is expected to influence more global conversations on caste equity, she added.

Explaining caste to America

"Unlike race which is mostly based on skin colour", the complex nature of the caste system is difficult to explain to Americans, Mr Bhupathi said.

"It's determined by birth. It determines where you stand in the hierarchical Hindu system," he said.

Prem Pariyar, a Nepali-origin academic and a lead organiser for Cal State's policy change, said he often used the metaphor "caste is the bone and race is the skin" from Isabel Wilkerson's book as an explanation.

The 2020 book - Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents - had compared the histories of caste and race and Mr Pariyar felt it helped spotlight caste discrimination in the US mainstream.

Mr Pariyar's experience had been undermined by upper-caste faculty at an academic senate of the university who said caste discrimination was "an Indian issue" so why discuss it in an American university?

This aversion to acknowledging caste is not uncommon among the dominant caste, said Ms Thomas, whose work delves into caste and gender in Christianity.



The challenge from right-wing Hindu groups

A win for this rights movement in the US has usually been followed by a challenge from right-wing Indian American groups like the Hindu American Foundation (HAF) which mobilise parts of the diaspora against it.

The foundation stood against the Cal State policy and the Cisco case, calling them "discriminatory" and a violation of "the rights of Hindu Americans".

In his book Open Embrace, Verghese K George wrote that the Indian-American community was willing to buy into the narrative that conflated "being Indian with being Hindu and being Hindu with being Indian".

The notion found an easy overlap with the ruling Indian government's agenda of promoting a pan-Hindu identity that did not address caste.

HAF is among several Indian-American organisations that have rallied support in the US for Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who has called the diaspora a "strategic asset".

With BJP's rise in India, Hindutva groups in the US have felt more empowered to increase their lobbying and legal efforts to curtail any changes to the status quo in the US, Mr Bhupathi said.

But caste equity is a vital and urgent frontier in global civil and human rights, Ms Soundararajan said. "We want to see those oppressed by caste informing institutions on how to transform themselves into places accessible to all."

Related Topics

Exhibit 30

Section I

NewsRoom

7/4/21 L.A. Times 1
2021 WLNR 21617976

Los Angeles Times
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July 4, 2021

Section: California

Caste system's insidious reach
More South Asians in the U.S. are speaking out and confronting intolerance, exclusion.

Nani Sahra **Walker**

SAN FRANCISCO

Prem Pariyar believed he had left caste oppression behind when he moved from Nepal to the United States.

Here, he would no longer be targeted as an "untouchable."

But as a restaurant worker in the Bay Area, Pariyar said, he endured some of the same discrimination and exclusion he faced in his home country. He was ordered to chop up a large sack of onions in less than an hour, and when he had to share an apartment with other Nepali immigrants, he was barred from sharing a bedroom with those of a dominant caste.

While doing social work in Nepal, he had spoken out publicly to protect Dalits, as members of oppressed castes call themselves. In California he found he had to assume the role of activist once again.

In a year when Black Lives Matter and anti-Asian-hate movements have raised awareness of systemic racism and discrimination, many Dalit activists have taken a collective stance to address the intolerance and violence that have followed them into their professional and educational careers in the United States. Formerly known as untouchables, Dalits fall at the bottom of a centuries-old South Asian social hierarchy that affects the lives of over a quarter of a billion people worldwide, including many in the U.S.

By tradition, caste is handed down at birth and determines a person's social status based on so-called spiritual purity. In this feudal system, those deemed impure are excluded from all spheres of life, including access and opportunity to education and work.

Although **caste discrimination** is officially banned in India and other countries in the region, the practice continues among South Asian communities.

According to the advocacy group Human Rights Watch, "police continue to detain, torture, and extort money from Dalits without much fear of punishment." The group says Dalit women are disproportionately raped and forced into prostitution.

Though a person may not reveal their caste background, that silence won't necessarily spare them from discrimination because certain surnames or professions are associated with particular castes, as are geographic areas.

"We view 'untouchable' as an epithet," said Thenmozhi Soundararajan, founder of Equality Labs, a nonprofit organization focused on ending what it calls caste apartheid. "No one gets to determine our positions toward God, and that's why we call ourselves Dalit. It means one who is broken but also one who is resilient."

Pariyar embodies that resilience.

He earned a bachelor's degree in education in Nepal and came to the U.S. in 2015 to seek asylum after being persecuted by dominant-caste people because he had decried caste atrocities in Nepal.

In time he was able to leave his restaurant job and become a student at Cal State East Bay in Hayward, where he earned a master's degree in social work. Soon, Pariyar said, he faced ostracism on campus too.

Nepali students kept their distance, and a dominant-caste classmate from India blocked his attempts to organize a conference on campus around Dalit rights. The conference was never held.

Many dominant-caste people deny caste exists.

But the practice of untouchability has been documented in the United States by Equality Labs.

In 2016, the nonprofit conducted a survey of 1,500 South Asians in the United States and found that 1 in 3 Dalit students surveyed reported being discriminated against during their education in the U.S. and 2 out of 3 Dalits said they had been treated unfairly at their workplace in the U.S.

On June 30, 2020, the California Department of Fair Employment and Housing filed a federal lawsuit against Cisco Systems for alleged caste-based discrimination against a Dalit engineer by two dominant-caste managers.

Without explanation, the department later dropped the suit in federal court and refiled in state court, where it is pending.

In a statement, Cisco said it did not tolerate discrimination and took complaints of mistreatment seriously.

"While caste is not currently protected under U.S. discrimination laws, we support legislative efforts to ensure a fair and equal workplace for all," the statement said. "In this case, we thoroughly and fully investigated the employee's concerns and found that he was treated fairly, highly compensated, and afforded opportunities to work on coveted projects. If we had found any discrimination or retaliation, we would have remediated it."

"The tech industry has been a bastion of caste bigotry," said Soundararajan. Her organization heard from scores of tech workers who said co-workers or supervisors discriminated against them because of their caste. "We had 250 complaints," she said, "and it was every single tech company you could imagine."

Soundararajan shared screenshots of casteist comments from Blind, an anonymous tech forum. Some writers left crude remarks about Dalits, while others argued there was nothing wrong with the caste system.

One user, VmBW03, wrote:

"How can caste be derogatory? It's beyond me. Caste is nothing different from surname. It's like ethnicity. Unless you are not proud of your ethnicity, no need to be ashamed of your caste. I for example am proud to be of a Brahmin background."

Soundararajan points out that many tech companies have Indians in leadership positions who are primarily Brahmin, or upper caste.

"There's no way that they don't understand the ramifications of caste," Soundararajan said. "And what's ironic is many of these companies in their operations in India and South Asia do have caste as a protected category. They just have refused to implement that at a global level, which has now created active harm for their caste-oppressed employees here in the United States."

Tech companies -- Microsoft, Facebook, Google, Apple and Twitter, among them -- say they do not tolerate discrimination in the workplace and that their anti-harassment policies cover mistreatment based on caste.

Some tech workers are speaking out against **caste discrimination** in the U.S.

In April, the newly formed Alphabet Workers Union released a statement in support of the lawsuit filed by the California Department of Fair Employment and Housing against Cisco.

The statement includes the Google parent company's anti-discrimination policy in India, which includes caste as a protected category but points out that caste is excluded in the U.S. and encourages the company to commit to caste equity.

"Much of our journey that we have to do as a community is to begin to have open conversations about these taboo fault lines," she said, "and be honest that the problems are occurring, so we can work together to find the remedies."

After years of Dalit-led community organizing, the Cal State Student Assn. passed a resolution in April seeking a ban on caste-based discrimination at its 23 campuses, representing nearly half a million students in California.

Pariyar, 37, has been a driving force in the movement to ask for caste protections from one of the largest public university systems in the United States. A Cal State spokesperson, providing few details, said the resolution was under discussion.

"I don't want my kids to grow up as untouchable, Dalits. I don't want them to be limited," he said. "I don't want them to be untouchables in the United States."

He recalled his first memories of being excluded as a child when his teacher asked him to bring a jug of water to the classroom. She took a sip. When fellow students outed him as an "untouchable," he said, she spit out the water.

All the students started laughing.

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Experience life as a Dalit person working in a tech office

Comments were collected by Equality Labs. For the full augmented-reality experience, launch the link using this QR code.

PHOTO: (no caption)

PHOTOGRAPHER:

PHOTO: AS A SOCIAL WORKER in Nepal, Prem Pariyar spoke out to protect Dalits, as members of oppressed castes call themselves. He's continuing the work in the U.S.

PHOTOGRAPHER:Nani Walker Los Angeles Times

PHOTO: PARIYAR, who got a master's degree in social work from Cal State East Bay, has pushed the system to enact protections against **caste discrimination**.

PHOTOGRAPHER:Nani Walker Los Angeles Times

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NewsRoom

Exhibit 30

Section m

The Washington Post
Democracy Dies in Darkness

Seattle becomes first U.S. city to ban caste discrimination



By [Niha Masih](#)

Updated February 22, 2023 at 2:06 a.m. EST | Published February 21, 2023 at 10:33 p.m. EST

The Seattle City Council voted Tuesday to ban caste-based discrimination, in the first such move by a U.S. city. The move adds caste as a protected category to the city's anti-discrimination laws, which already include prohibitions against discriminating on disability, religion and sexual orientation.

The movement has won a "historic, first-in-the-nation ban on caste discrimination," tweeted Kshama Sawant, the socialist council member who introduced the legislation. "Now we need to build a movement to spread this victory around the country."

The caste system is a hierarchal structure that determines a person's social standing at birth. It has roots in Hinduism but later proliferated to members of other faiths in South Asia. Dalits, formerly called untouchables, are relegated to the bottom rung in the South Asian order, though India legally abolished the concept of "untouchability" decades ago.

But caste-based discrimination remains entrenched in society, and similar practices have followed the South Asian diaspora community to the United States and elsewhere, activists say. More recently, there have been efforts to bring attention to caste-based prejudice in Silicon Valley and Seattle workplaces, where there are many tech professionals of South Asian origin. More than 150,000 people from South Asia live in Washington state, with many based in the greater Seattle area, the city council said.

Seattle's move will prohibit businesses from discriminating on caste lines when it comes to employment, access to public spaces and housing, Sawant said when she introduced the measure.

"It is a national problem," said Thenmozhi Soundararajan, director of Equality Labs, a Dalit civil rights groups in California. She said her organization had received complaints from more than 250 workers, with many alleging "caste slurs in workplaces, bullying and harassment, sexual harassment, demotion to retaliation and even firing."

Case 2:22-cv-07550-RGK-MAA Document 87-32 Filed 05/15/23 Page 94 of 145 Page ID
#1033
Communities in Africa, the Middle East and the Pacific region also have caste-based exclusionary systems, according to a 2016 report by the United Nations, that also found that at least 250 million people are affected by such discrimination.

The Seattle measure was opposed by the Hindu American Foundation, which said that it was against caste-based discrimination but argued that the measure would single out its community. It said in a Tuesday statement that it is investigating “all avenues of response.”

Dalit rights groups have documented examples of caste bias in the United States.

In June 2020, Cisco and two of its former managers were sued by California’s Department of Fair Employment and Housing, accusing it of discriminating against a Dalit engineer. (As of last summer, the case was ongoing.)

A group of 30 female Indian engineers who worked at tech companies including Google and Apple released a statement in October 2020 that said they had seen or experienced caste discrimination at their workplaces. They called working with Indian managers a “living hell” and said they did not have avenues to report discrimination to their companies because caste was not a protected class.

Education institutes were some of the first organizations in the United States to enact protections against caste bias. The California State University system added caste as a protected category under its anti-discrimination policy last year. (Two Hindu professors filed a lawsuit against the measure.)

Yashica Dutt, who grew up in a Dalit family in small-town India and now lives in New York, said she feels more comfortable asserting her identity in the United States, though caste bias is “still very present.”

Dutt, author of the 2019 memoir “Coming Out as Dalit” said she has made decisions with her caste as a factor while in the United States, such as not living in neighborhoods with a large South Asian population and not working in the tech industry.

“It’s a bitter system that dehumanizes you,” she said after the Seattle vote. “Finally, people will have some protection.”

Nitasha Tiku contributed to this report.

Exhibit 30

Section n

The Washington Post
Democracy Dies in Darkness

ASIA

The Dalit filmmaker challenging India's caste discrimination



By [Niha Masih](#)

June 10, 2022 at 1:59 a.m. EDT

CHENNAI, India — Pa Ranjith was often reminded by his mother not to reveal his caste. Instead, he did what few had dared to do in the film industry. He made his identity central to his work.

He is the first commercially successful Dalit filmmaker in India, featuring Dalit characters as heroes and highlighting caste oppression, which remains entrenched in the country despite decades of affirmative action and anti-discrimination laws.

Inspired by Black artists from America's civil rights era, Ranjith has created a thriving cultural center in the southern state of Tamil Nadu meant to empower the Dalit community, formerly known as "untouchables." The aim is to transform a popular culture that has always typecast or ignored people from lower castes. He has established a publishing unit for young Dalit writers and poets, an anti-caste band, and a YouTube channel showcasing Dalit life and food, among nearly a dozen initiatives.

"I have food habits, music, art that is different from what is shown in popular culture," Ranjith said on a recent afternoon at his office in a historical neighborhood in Chennai, the state's capital. "This is not talking about casteism. This is my culture."

Dalits are at the bottom rung of Hinduism's discriminatory and hierarchical social system, in which a person's place is determined at birth. They suffer violent abuse from upper-caste groups for acts as mundane as growing a mustache or riding a horse at a wedding. They often struggle to find housing, access basic services or marry outside their caste. Many are still forced to toil as scavengers, cleaning sewers and septic tanks by hand.

“Struggle is a part of every Dalit life. My life is [a form of] resistance,” Ranjith said. “I’m not only a person — I’m a repository of [discrimination] stories.”

This year, as Ranjith marks a decade in the film industry, he has kept busy. Hundreds turned up for an arts festival he hosted in April as part of the celebrations for Dalit History Month, modeled on Black History Month in the United States. The director made his Cannes Film Festival debut last month, and an upcoming movie on the life of a tribal leader will be his first foray into Bollywood.

Now he is inspiring others to share their stories on different platforms.

On a recent afternoon, at the office of Neelam Social, the Ranjith-backed YouTube channel, a 21-year-old woman named Abisha was rapping about her people.

Outta sight, outskirts is where we are forced to reside;

Refugee in our own lands,

You’ve snatched away all our rights.

Abisha has filmed a documentary about a musical instrument played by Dalits during protests and told stories about the eviction of slum-dwellers in Chennai, which inspired her to write the rap song.

“This may reach only a small set of people, but it’s necessary to create a ripple effect,” said Abisha, who uses just one name. “My voice is important because if I don’t do this, no one else would.”

One of the channel’s most popular shows is about Dalit food. A recent episode featured beef, which became a part of the community’s diet over centuries of segregation but is now banned in many parts of India. Cows are considered sacred in Hinduism, and Dalits often face violence from vigilantes in the name of cow protection.

In another corner of Chennai, where most film studios are based, Ranjith built the Koogai library. “Koogai” means “owl” in Tamil and is the name of a popular novel about the tyranny of caste.

“People who come from small towns and villages to work in the Tamil film industry but don’t know where to go or what to do come here,” said Moorthy, 33, one of the supervisors at the library, which has books on cinema and hosts workshops and film screenings.

Moorthy, who also goes by one name, was raised by a single mother in a rural area. He arrived in the city with big dreams of working in the film industry but not much else. He failed.

When he returned to Chennai years later in 2018, the library was just taking off. He found a space to learn and grow.

Last year, he bagged his first film assignment as an assistant director. “Ranjith paved the way for us and groomed us,” Moorthy said. “In the next decade, the most important directors in the industry will be from Koogai.”

For all of Ranjith’s ambition, the 39-year-old father of two is unassuming, dressed in a white cotton shirt and blue slacks. His office space is modestly furnished, without any movie paraphernalia. There are books everywhere, as well as a bust and a photograph of Bhimrao Ambedkar, the chief architect of India’s constitution and its most revered Dalit leader.

Ranjith’s career took off after the success of his first two films, which industry insiders credit with changing caste representation in Tamil movies.

He is a “damn good filmmaker” and a “pioneer,” said film critic Baradwaj Rangan. “He created a path for others to make films about their identity without being afraid.”

The director’s biggest break came when he was approached by Rajnikanth, a film star idolized by millions of fans globally. The duo went on to collaborate on two hugely successful blockbusters.

In “Kaala,” or “Black,” Rajnikanth plays a Dalit character from a Mumbai slum who takes on a corrupt politician. The other film, “Kabali,” was one of India’s top-grossing films.

“Earlier the producers didn’t want to invest in such films because they would not make money,” Ranjith said. “My idea is simple. Do it in an engaging and entertaining way for a mainstream audience.”

The director’s unapologetic views often draw a backlash, particularly from Hindu nationalists, who view his critique of caste discrimination as a criticism of Hinduism.

He has been accused of “vicious Hinduphobia” and faced a police complaint for remarks against an ancient Hindu king.

But criticism doesn’t bother him. People make him out to be an “angry person,” he said. “I’m not.” He is simply stubborn and committed to his goal, he said, which he shares with his idol, Ambedkar.

“Equality,” he stated simply. “That’s the legacy I want to leave behind.”

Exhibit 30

Section o

NewsRoom

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October 27, 2020

Section: /technology

India's engineers have thrived in Silicon Valley. So has its **caste system**.

Nitasha Tiku

Whenever Benjamin Kaila, a database administrator who immigrated from India to the United States in 1999, applies for a job at a U.S. tech company, he prays that there are no other Indians during the in-person interview. That's because Kaila is a Dalit, or member of the lowest-ranked castes within India's system of social hierarchy, formerly referred to as "untouchables."

Silicon Valley's diversity issues are well documented: It's still dominated by White and Asian men, and Black and Latino workers remain underrepresented. But for years, as debates about meritocracy raged on, the tech industry's reliance on Indian engineers allowed another type of discrimination to fester. And Dalit engineers like Kaila say U.S. employers aren't equipped to address it.

In more than 100 job interviews for contract work over the past 20 years, Kaila said he got only one job offer when another Indian interviewed him in person. When members of the interview panel have been Indian, Kaila says, he has faced personal questions that seem to be used to suss out whether he's a member of an upper caste, like most of the Indians working in the tech industry.

"They don't bring up caste, but they can easily identify us," Kaila says, rattling off all of the ways he can be outed as potentially being Dalit, including the fact that he has darker skin.

The legacy of discrimination from the Indian **caste system** is rarely discussed as a factor in Silicon Valley's persistent diversity problems. Decades of tech industry labor practices, such as recruiting candidates from a small cohort of top schools or relying on the H-1B visa system for highly skilled workers, have shaped the racial demographics of its technical workforce. Despite that fact, Dalit engineers and advocates say that tech companies don't understand caste bias and have not explicitly prohibited caste-based discrimination.

In recent years, however, the Dalit rights movement has grown increasingly global, including advocating for change in corporate America. In June, California's Department of Fair Employment and Housing filed a landmark suit against Cisco and two of its former engineering managers, both upper-caste Indians, for discriminating against a Dalit engineer.

After the lawsuit was announced, Equality Labs, a nonprofit advocacy group for Dalit rights, received complaints about caste bias from nearly 260 U.S. tech workers in three weeks, reported through the group's website or in emails to individual staffers. Allegations included caste-based slurs and jokes, bullying, discriminatory hiring practices, bias in peer reviews, and sexual harassment, said executive director Thenmozhi Soundararajan. The highest number of claims were from workers at Facebook

(33), followed by Cisco (24), Google (20), Microsoft (18), IBM (17) and Amazon (14). The companies all said they don't tolerate discrimination.

And a group of 30 female Indian engineers who are members of the Dalit caste and work for Google, Apple, Microsoft, Cisco and other tech companies say they have faced caste bias inside the U.S. tech sector, according to a statement shared exclusively with The Washington Post.

The women, who shared the statement on the condition of anonymity for fear of retaliation, argue that networks of engineers from the dominant castes have replicated the patterns of bias within the United States by favoring their peers in hiring, referrals and performance reviews.

"We also have had to weather demeaning insults to our background and that we have achieved our jobs solely due to affirmative action. It is exhausting," they wrote. "We are good at our jobs and we are good engineers. We are role models for our community and we want to continue to work in our jobs. But it is unfair for us to continue in hostile workplaces, without protections from caste discrimination."

The tech industry has grown increasingly dependent on Indian workers. According to the State Department, the United States has issued more than 1.7 million H-1B visas since 2009, 65 percent of which have gone to people of Indian nationality. Close to 70 percent of H-1B visa holders work in the tech industry, up from less than 40 percent in 2003, says David J. Bier, an immigration policy analyst at the Cato Institute.

Devesh Kapur, a professor of South Asian studies at Johns Hopkins University, found that in 2003, only 1.5 percent of Indian immigrants in the United States were Dalits or members of the lower-ranked castes.

Big Tech's annual company diversity reports typically don't distinguish between East Asian or South Asian workers and do not delve into caste, class, or socioeconomic distinctions of any race or gender. And the immigration status of Dalit workers, including visas and green cards that require being sponsored by their employers, made it difficult for them to speak out against the discrimination they allege, says Soundararajan from Equality Labs, which is conducting a formal survey to follow-up on the claims they received this summer.

"Just like racism, casteism is alive in America and in the tech sector," said Seattle-based Microsoft engineer Raghav Kaushik, who was born into a dominant caste but who has been involved in advocacy work for years. "What is happening at Cisco is not a one-off thing; it's indicative of a much larger phenomenon."

In a statement, Cisco spokesperson Robyn Blum said: "Cisco is committed to an inclusive workplace for all. We have robust processes to report and investigate concerns raised by employees which were followed in this case dating back to 2016, and have determined we were fully in compliance with all laws as well as our own policies. Cisco will vigorously defend itself against the allegations made in this complaint."

Dalit engineers said that most Indian workers from upper castes do not seem aware of their caste privilege and believe caste bias is a thing of the past, despite the fact that high-profile tech CEOs and board members, such as Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella and Amazon board member Indra Nooyi, the former CEO of Pepsi, are Brahmins, or members of the highest caste.

In a statement, Facebook spokesperson Nneka Norville said: "To build services for the whole world, we need a diverse and inclusive workplace. We train managers to understand the issues team members from different backgrounds may face and have courses to help employees counter unconscious bias."

Apple spokesperson Rachel Tulley said: "At Apple, we are dedicated to providing employees with a workplace where they feel safe, respected, and inspired to do their best work. We have strict policies that prohibit any discrimination or harassment, including based on caste, and we provide training for all employees to ensure our policies are upheld."

Google spokesperson Jennifer Rodstrom said: "Our policies prohibit harassment and discrimination in the workplace. We investigate any allegations and take firm action against employees who violate our policies."

Microsoft spokesperson Frank X. Shaw said there are no official complaints of caste bias at Microsoft in the United States.

Amazon spokesperson Adam Sedo said, "We do not tolerate any kind of discrimination in the workplace, and our code of conduct explicitly prohibits discrimination against any employee or candidate on the basis of creed and ancestry." (Amazon chief executive Jeff Bezos owns The Washington Post.)

IBM declined to comment.

Caste is often discovered through questions, not always through appearance. (Although Dalits may have a darker complexion, skin color is not synonymous with caste.) Questions about whether someone is a vegetarian, where they grew up, what religion they practice or who they married may be used as a "caste locator," seven Indian engineers working in the United States said in interviews with The Post, unrelated to the statement shared by 30 female Indian engineers.

Other tests include patting an Indian man on the back to see whether he is wearing a "sacred thread" worn by some Brahmins, the highest-ranked caste. (This gesture is sometimes referred to as the "Tam-Bram pat," in reference to Tamil-speaking Brahmins.)

Internal Microsoft emails from 2006 obtained by The Post indicate that caste bias is a long-standing problem within the industry. That year, after the Indian government announced affirmative action measures for marginalized castes, a debate broke out on a company thread about whether the bar was being lowered for Dalit candidates and about their inherent intelligence and work ethic. HR intervened but only to temporarily shut down the thread.

No employees faced consequences for expressing bias against Dalits, according to Kaushik and Prashant Nema, currently a performance and capacity engineer at Facebook, who worked at Microsoft at the time. Shaw said Microsoft encourages and facilitates dialogue and feedback from all employees but declined to comment on the specifics of the 2006 thread.

"If anything, it's probably gotten worse" since then because of the election of Narendra Modi as prime minister, whose administration has tried to roll back protections for Dalits, Kaushik says. "A lot of the previously repressed ideas, now South Asians feel more emboldened to say it out loud."

Recent discussion threads about the Cisco case on the anonymous app Blind show tech workers raising the same questions about Dalit engineers in 2020.

In the Cisco suit, the complainant, an Indian engineer identified as John Doe, alleges he was paid less and denied opportunities because both managers knew he is Dalit. It also claims that Doe faced retaliation after he complained about facing a hostile work environment.

The lawsuit, which was initially filed in federal court before being refiled last week in state court in Santa Clara County, where Cisco is headquartered, alleges that Cisco violated the California Fair Employment and Housing Act, which prohibits employment discrimination based on race, religion, national origin, and ancestry.

If Doe wins, it will be the first major case to prove discrimination against Dalits in the private sector, says Kevin Brown, a law professor at Indiana University at Bloomington, who has been traveling to India and studying the Dalit rights movement for

more than 20 years. Brown says the decision would have a clear impact on tech companies' U.S. operations but also raise the importance of the issue for multinational companies operating in India.

The 30 female engineers are urging their employers, as well as corporate America at large, to include caste as a protected category, so that they feel comfortable reporting this type of bias to human resources. The group includes a few engineers who worked on contract for U.S. tech companies — both in the United States and India through multinational outsourcing companies. However, most of the women are currently tech employees living in the United States.

The female engineers described Indian engineering managers from dominant castes who excluded them from opportunities for promotion, made inappropriate jokes about Dalit and Muslim women and about Dalit reservations (the Indian government's term for affirmative action), and, in the worst cases, subjected them to sexual harassment.

The Dalit women said they immigrated to the United States hoping to escape bullying and abuse they endured at India's top engineering schools, where members of the dominant castes questioned their competence as developers. But elite academic centers, such as the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs), also act as a feeder system for tech talent to Silicon Valley.

In the Cisco case, for instance, both John Doe and the manager who outed him graduated from IIT Bombay.

Harvard professor Ajantha Subramanian, author of "The Caste of Merit: Engineering Education in India," says the IITs have an "outsized influence in U.S. tech culture" through powerful alumni networks that have facilitated the entry of a younger generation into Silicon Valley.

"While caste bias is not unique to the IITs, it is pervasive on the campuses because of widely shared assumptions among upper-caste faculty and students about upper-caste merit and lower-caste intellectual inferiority," Subramanian says. "Such assumptions were quite clearly in play in the Cisco case."

The consequences of being identified as Dalit can also lead to social exclusion by co-workers, even outside the office. One engineer and former contractor for Cisco said he was temporarily removed from a WhatsApp group with other Cisco workers after sharing a news story critical of Brahmin supremacy.

Indian engineers said they did not always trust that Americans would comprehend the power dynamics underlying caste oppression. In interviews, many Indian engineers referenced journalist Isabel Wilkerson's best-selling new book, "Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents," which argues that treatment of Black people in the United States is the result of a caste-based hierarchy.

Despite the risks of speaking out, Dalit engineers and their allies have seized on the discussion around historic racism to share their individual observations and experiences about workplace discrimination.

The prevalence of caste bias makes the outcome of the Cisco case more urgent, Microsoft's Kaushik says. "Then it doesn't matter what Microsoft thinks, it doesn't matter what Google thinks, it doesn't matter what Amazon thinks. They have to pay attention to the law."

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NewsRoom

Exhibit 30

Section p

GUEST ESSAY

Why Is Caste Inequality Still Legal in America?

May 25, 2021

By Paula Chakravartty and Ajantha Subramanian

Dr. Chakravartty is a professor of media and communication at New York University who has written extensively about race, migration and labor in the United States and India. Dr. Subramanian is a professor of anthropology and South Asian studies at Harvard University and has written extensively about caste and democracy in India.

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Caste is not well understood in the United States, even though it plays a significant role in the lives of Americans of South Asian descent. Two recent lawsuits make caste among the South Asian diaspora much more visible. They show that oppressed castes in the United States are doubly disadvantaged — by caste and race. Making caste a protected category under federal law will allow for the recognition of this double disadvantage.

Caste is a descent-based structure of inequality. In South Asia, caste privilege has worked through the control of land, labor, education, media, white-collar professions and political institutions. While power and status are more fluid in the intermediate rungs of the caste hierarchy, Dalits, the group once known as “untouchables” who occupy its lowest rung, have experienced far less social and economic mobility. To this day, they are stigmatized as inferior and polluting, and typically segregated into hazardous, low-status forms of labor.

The Indian government has many laws to combat caste prejudice and inequality. But attempts to provide oppressed castes with protection and redress — through affirmative action, for example — are met with fierce opposition from privileged castes. The past 20 years have also witnessed the rise of Dalit political movements and the emergence of a nascent middle class that has benefited from affirmative action. However, oppressed castes’ claims to dignity, well-being and rights are still routinely met with social ostracism, economic boycotts or physical violence.

Caste continues to operate in America, among the South Asian diaspora, but in a very different legal and economic context. Immigrants from India and other South Asian countries began arriving in large numbers after restrictive immigration policies based on rigid racial hierarchies were changed starting in the second half of the 20th century. These reforms provided opportunities mostly for privileged castes, like our own families, who have used their historical advantages to become an affluent and professionally successful racial minority in the United States.

Oppressed castes are a minority within this minority, and they continue to be subject to forms of caste discrimination and exploitation, as the two lawsuits make clear. Together, these cases show how caste operates within America’s racially stratified work force to create largely hidden, yet pernicious patterns of discrimination and exploitation. In both, the litigants are members of the oppressed caste Dalits.

One case is a discrimination suit filed in June 2020 against the technology conglomerate Cisco Systems Inc. and two supervisors by the California Department of Fair Employment and Housing on behalf of a Dalit engineer. According to the lawsuit, Cisco failed to adequately address caste discrimination by two privileged-caste supervisors. The Dalit engineer alleges that one of the supervisors “outed” him as a beneficiary of Indian affirmative action. The lawsuit says that when he complained to the human resources department, both supervisors retaliated by denying him opportunities for advancement.

The plaintiff and one of the supervisors are graduates of the Indian Institutes of Technology, a set of elite public technical universities. When the Indian government extended caste-based affirmative action to these colleges in 1973 and 2006, students admitted through the quotas were met with fierce opposition and stigmatized as unworthy of an elite education. The fear of exposure has forced many Dalit students in India to pass as non-Dalits.

The Cisco case appears to shed light on the same patterns of caste discrimination in the U.S. tech sector. By allegedly “outing” the Dalit engineer, the supervisor marked his caste and, in effect, deemed him unworthy of his position at Cisco. The company has denied the allegations and said that its investigation found no grounds to support claims of caste discrimination or retaliation.

The other case shows how stark differences of caste power and status may be carried over from South Asia to America, a situation that can lead to labor exploitation. In May 2021, lawyers representing a group of Dalit workers filed a lawsuit against the Hindu sect known as BAPS (Bochasanwasi Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha) and related parties. The workers allege that they were brought to the United States on visas designated for religious workers to help build a temple in New Jersey. They claim that they were forced to work for more than 87 hours a week for \$450 a month, or less than \$2 an hour. Furthermore, they said they were not allowed to leave the temple property unaccompanied, were constantly monitored and were threatened with pay cuts, arrest and expulsion to India if they spoke to outsiders. BAPS has denied the allegations.

If the charges are proved to be true, BAPS will have weaponized the American visa system to violate U.S. labor and immigration law and engage in caste exploitation. But the situation is different in South Asia than it is in the United States. In South Asia, there is legal recourse for oppressed-caste rights. In the United States, however, there is little recourse. The lack of explicit legal protection for caste creates the conditions of impunity for caste exploitation.

Making caste a protected category is a critical step toward addressing the problem of caste in America. To protect oppressed castes in the United States, we have to be willing to insist that civil rights extend to communities whose oppression is still hidden.

Paula Chakravartty is a professor of media and communication at New York University who has written extensively about race, migration and labor in the United States and India. Ajantha Subramanian is a professor of anthropology and South Asian studies at Harvard University and has written extensively about caste and democracy in India.

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Exhibit 30

Section q

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Caste Discrimination Exists in the U.S., Too—But a Movement to Outlaw It Is Growing



People walk in front of Wheeler Hall on the University of California campus in Berkeley, Calif., on March 11, 2020. Jeff Chiu
—AP

BY **ROHIT CHOPRA** AND **AJANTHA SUBRAMANIAN** FEBRUARY 11, 2022 1:54 PM EST

IDEAS*Chopra is Associate Professor of Communication at Santa Clara University**Subramanian is Professor of Anthropology and South Asian Studies and Mehra Family**Professor of South Asian Studies at Harvard University*

In late January, California State University added caste to its non-discrimination policy. With more than 437,000 students and 44,000 employees statewide, it is the largest academic institution to do so. But it is not alone. Brandeis University was the first to take this step in 2019. University of California, Davis, Colby College, Colorado College, the Claremont colleges, and Carleton University followed suit. In August 2021, the California Democratic Party added caste as a protected category to their Party Code of Conduct. And in December 2021, the Harvard Graduate Student Union ratified its collective bargaining agreement, which included caste as a protected category for its members.

What is caste? How is caste discrimination expressed? And why are protections against caste discrimination an urgent issue in the U.S.?

Caste is a descent-based structure of inequality in which privilege works through the control of land, labor, education, media, white-collar professions and political institutions. Some seventy years after independence from colonial rule, the specter of casteism continues to haunt South Asia. The unequal inheritances of caste shape every aspect of social life, from education to

marriage, housing, and employment. Caste discrimination still plagues all South Asian societies, including India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal, and Sri Lanka. To this day, oppressed castes are subject to stigma on the basis of perceived social and intellectual inferiority, and often consigned to the most exploitative segments of the labor market. This is especially true of Dalits, which is the broad term for the community that occupies the bottom rung of the caste ladder and suffers the unique stigma of untouchability. Dalits continue to face pervasive violence, humiliation, and exclusion. The coronavirus pandemic has only amplified the practice of ‘untouchability’ through the segregating and shunning of stigmatized groups.

The ugly realities of caste inequality and discrimination also shape the lives of South Asian communities in the diaspora. In the U.S., two recent lawsuits have exposed the pervasiveness of caste dynamics far beyond the borders of South Asia.

The first lawsuit was filed in June 2020 against the software company Cisco Systems. Brought by the California Department for Fair Employment and Housing, it alleges that the company failed to address caste discrimination against an employee from the Dalit caste by two supervisors from more privileged caste backgrounds.

The second was filed in May 2021 against the Hindu trust BAPS (Bochasanwasi Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha), a nonprofit that since 2009 has had the status of a 501 (c)(3) organization. It was brought by lawyers representing a group of Dalits who claim that they were brought to the United States under the R1 visa for religious workers and forced into underpaid, exploitative construction work on a Hindu temple in New Jersey. Both lawsuits reveal practices of caste discrimination and exploitation within America’s racially stratified workforce.

These lawsuits reflect long-standing trends within U.S. immigration. The 1965 Hart-Cellar Act legalized a preference for professional class migrants, such as doctors and engineers, from all over the world, even as it sought to undo the racial prejudices of the immigration laws that it replaced. The shift in

immigration policy ensured that South Asians from dominant castes—the ones with privileged access to education and white-collar professions—were overrepresented in the United States in comparison to the South Asian population at large. The caste inequities of Indian education have allowed these groups to use their privilege to immigrate and succeed professionally.

The highly selective character of the professional South Asian American population has therefore created the conditions for caste bias and discrimination in hiring and promotion. This is especially the case in the U.S. technology sector, which has significant privileged caste representation. Although the first to be made public, the experience of the Dalit employee in the Cisco case is not uncommon. Following the filing of the case, Dalit tech workers employed in some of the biggest companies have come forward to attest to rampant caste bias. Most feel compelled to conceal their caste identities and pass as non-Dalits in workplaces that they share with members of more privileged castes. They experience these workplaces as minefields where colleagues from privileged castes might probe their backgrounds to find out their origins and where a misstep can lead to exposure and stigma. These workers indicate a clear preference for non-South Asian supervisors whose ignorance of caste ensures fairer treatment. While such testimonies provide an important starting point for understanding the employment experiences of oppressed castes in the U.S., more data on caste demographics is needed to reveal the scale of the problem.

These lawsuits underscore the need for adding caste to the existing set of categories that are protected against discrimination under federal law. The legal recognition of caste as a protected category will destigmatize caste identification and ensure that vulnerable caste groups do not feel threatened when revealing their identities. Most importantly, making caste a protected category would recognize a form of discrimination that deeply affects marginalized South Asian caste groups—highlighting prejudices that have been invisible for too long.

However, there are some South Asian Americans who argue that the legal recognition of caste discrimination would be harmful to South Asians in the

U.S. One of the most prominent groups that has come out against adding caste to U.S. anti-discrimination law is the Hindu American Foundation (HAF). HAF contends that doing so will “single out and target Indian Americans for scrutiny and discrimination.” In her testimony at an April 29 public hearing on a proposal to recognize caste discrimination in Santa Clara, California, HAF Executive Director, Suhag Shukla, characterized caste as “a stereotype.” She asserted that if caste were added as a protected category, it would be used to “uniquely target South Asians, Indians, and Hindus for ethno-religious profiling, monitoring, and policing.” HAF also opposes the legal recognition of caste on the grounds that doing so will “target” the Hindu religion.

But caste is not a mere stereotype about South Asian societies. It is a lived reality that promotes unequal access to life, livelihood, and the capacity for human flourishing. Furthermore, caste must not be conflated with a nationality, ethnicity, or religion. Scholars have long shown, and human rights reports document, that caste exists across all South Asian nationalities, ethnicities, and religions. Testimonies at the Santa Clara hearing also confirmed this reality by attesting to casteism among South Asian Christians, Muslims, and Hindus alike. Spurious arguments about “Hinduphobia” should thus not be used to shield caste from scrutiny.

HAF’s arguments assume that dignity and rights are a zero-sum game. Extending protections to oppressed castes will not scapegoat Hindus, Indians, and South Asians any more than extending protections to women scapegoats men. To the contrary, acknowledging the realities of caste discrimination and any actions for accountability and justice that follow upon it would only expand the commitment to equal rights, inclusion, and dignity.

Opponents of making caste a protected category also argue that it would force South Asian Americans and their children to think of themselves in terms of caste identity. At the Santa Clara public hearing, for instance, several individuals speaking against the proposal testified that, as Americans, they no longer identify as members of castes. Privileged castes in the United States may well insist that they do not see or believe in caste. They may well believe that caste classification would impose an identity that they do not claim. But just as

race-blindness does not erase racial privilege or disadvantage, caste-blindness does not erase caste privilege or disadvantage. Indeed, the claim to being caste-blind is itself an expression of privilege. As is clear from Dalit testimonies, oppressed castes do not have the luxury of caste blindness.

Caste and race cannot and should not be conflated. Yet, a broad parallel may be drawn between the experiences of racial minorities and oppressed caste groups in the U.S. While members of South Asian American communities rightly draw attention to the long history of racial exclusion and discrimination they have experienced in the U.S., those of privileged caste backgrounds simultaneously resist acknowledging the abiding ugliness of caste discrimination within their communities.

Unfortunately, it is this very history of racial discrimination that is now being wielded against protections for oppressed castes. HAF even contends that making caste a protected category would perpetuate colonial violence. In his testimony in Santa Clara, HAF Managing Director, Samir Kalra, stated that caste is a “British created legal category” and an identity “that was forced on South Asians.” He and other HAF members insist that caste is a colonial invention that was and could again be used as a weapon of white supremacy. But caste is a power difference that existed well before colonialism and did not end with it. As noted in a recent scholarly article, caste has long been “a total social fact” in South Asian societies. The Indian Constitution recognizes the deep history of caste inequality and has enacted various laws to combat and correct it. The Cisco and BAPS lawsuits demonstrate that caste inequality and discrimination have been carried by South Asians to the United States. Should different rules apply here simply because South Asians are a racial minority?

The same South Asian American groups that equate caste protections in the US with “Hinduphobia” also oppose any criticism of Hindutva, or Hindu nationalism, the political movement that has captured state power in India. For instance, HAF’s founder, Mihir Meghani, is the author of “Hindutva – the Great Nationalist Ideology,” an essay that was published on the website of India’s ruling party, the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party. After the election of Narendra Modi in 2014, HAF has also lobbied U.S. lawmakers to adopt pro-

Indian Government positions on the abrogation of the special status of the State of Jammu and Kashmir and on the Citizenship Amendment Act, a discriminatory law targeting Muslims.

But just as caste protections are not anti-Hindu, neither is criticism of Hindutva. Hindutva is an authoritarian political ideology aimed at transforming India from a secular democracy to a Hindu majoritarian country where Muslims, Christians, and other religious minorities are relegated to second-class citizenship. Under the current Hindu nationalist government in India, there has been a precipitous rise in religious and caste violence targeting Muslims, Christians, and Dalits and widespread crackdowns on dissenters who are languishing in prison without due process. South Asian American groups like HAF are thus engaged in a form of double-speak: they weaponize religious and racial minority protections in the U.S. while defending majoritarianism in India.

By twisting anti-discrimination protections for oppressed castes into racial and religious discrimination, those who oppose making caste a protected category distract attention from the pressing problem of caste in America. This defense of minority rights might appear progressive but we must recognize it for what it is: a defense of caste privilege by diasporic South Asians who are its beneficiaries. As a minority within a minority in the U.S., oppressed castes must get the recognition and protection they deserve.

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Exhibit 30

Section r

ASIAN AMERICA

Harvard adds caste bias protections for graduate student workers

After months of negotiations, the Ivy League school added protections for caste-oppressed students to its graduate student union contract.



— The Harvard University campus in Cambridge, Mass. Maddie Meyer / Getty Images file

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Dec. 2, 2021, 1:13 PM PST / Updated Dec. 2, 2021, 2:55 PM PST

By Sakshi Venkatraman

Harvard University is the latest U.S. school to add measures protecting caste-oppressed students following a push from graduate workers and a national organization.

Since March, South Asian graduate student organizers have tried to point out to the university's administration what they say is a real problem on campuses across the U.S.: discrimination based on the Hindu caste system.

Those born into lower castes, known as Dalits in India's deeply rooted hierarchies, have faced violence and oppression on the subcontinent for thousands of years. Though the system is now illegal in India, its impact is still far-reaching and can manifest themselves in a lack of social and economic mobility.

With the increase in South Asian immigration to the U.S. since the 1980s and '90s, the hierarchies have been carried overseas.

Twenty-five percent of Dalits in the U.S. report having faced verbal or physical assault, [according to research by Equality Labs](#), an organization dedicated to ending white supremacy and casteism. One in 3 Dalit students also reported experiencing prejudice that affected their education, the study found.

Students trying to combat this on their campuses say they run into barriers in the process, particularly a sheer lack of knowledge among administrators.

Aparna Gopalan, a South Indian doctoral student at Harvard and a member of the Graduate Student Union, has been part of negotiations since March to add more protected classes to the union's contract. She says she found herself in board rooms filled with white administrators who had no foundational grasp of the caste system.

"They had no idea what caste was," Gopalan said. "I don't think they really understood. At one point, they asked, 'Why isn't caste just protected under nationality?' and I was flabbergasted. We were operating on a very basic level."

But after months of talks between the union and the administration, as well support from Equality Labs, the Graduate Student Union's contract was ratified this week and caste was added as the only new protected category.

Harvard declined to comment other than confirming the contract has been ratified.

Gopalan said that after the provision was approved, Dalit students began to come forward with their own experiences of discrimination, including by South Asian supervisors and instructors

who would give their work less attention than that of upper caste students. Slurs and microaggressions from other students were also common.

"We need for every student covered under this contract to be aware that this is even in there," Gopalan said. "No one can come forward if they aren't explicitly aware that this is protected."

Slurs are just the beginning of what Dalit students across the country have experienced on campus, said Thenmozhi Soundararajan, executive director of Equality Labs. The longtime Dalit rights activist has advocated for young people facing sexual harassment, housing discrimination, diminished opportunities and physical assaults.

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"This important step recognizes first that we, too, exist at Harvard and that our experiences matter," said Raj Muthu, a Dalit Harvard alum and a member of Equality Labs' coalition. "As an alumni, I have certainly witnessed expressions of disdain and hostility directed towards members of oppressed castes, students and faculty."

Dalits on campus might also feel like they don't belong in South Asian circles that are heavily pervaded with casteism or dominated by upper caste students.

"Overall as a student from a caste-oppressed community, there is a deep sense of alienation and not belonging in South Asian settings," he said. "It's a very isolating experience because as immigrants we try to seek refuge in our own ethnic communities."

But progress may be on the horizon. Through Equality Labs, Soundararajan has supported student bodies as they push their administrations to protect the caste-oppressed among them.

Harvard is only the latest to add a measure, with the University of California, Davis, and Colby College both taking similar steps in the last few months.

“These aren’t overnight wins,” she said. “These are the results of many leaders going through the administrative process and building power toward caste equity.”

She’s sure that there are more to come.

“I see the change,” she said. “There hasn’t been a university that hasn’t wanted to do this.”

After Black Lives Matter protests in the summer of 2020, Soundararajan said schools became much more open to inclusive language. With high profile institutions beginning to adopt caste protection into official documents, she thinks others will soon follow suit.

For Gopalan, Harvard’s new contract with the union is the beginning of change, not the end.

“This is just the Grad Student Union,” she said. “We would like every union to have it at Harvard. We would like the university itself, outside of just workers, to put it in their handbooks.”

Those affected by caste oppression know it’s a struggle that has long been invisible to non-South Asians in the U.S. Soundararajan hopes these university-level changes can be the first steps in a broader conversation.

“It makes sure that our civil rights are being respected,” she said.

Sakshi Venkatraman

Sakshi Venkatraman is a reporter for NBC Asian America.

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Exhibit 30

Section s

Gail Omvedt, 80, Dies; India Became Her Home, the Caste System Her Cause

An American-born sociologist, she moved to India in the 1970s, helped pioneer the study of castes and drew attention to the lives of the country's most oppressed.



By Sameer Yasir

Sept. 1, 2021

Gail Omvedt, an anti-caste crusader, scholar and prolific author who championed the cause of India's marginalized communities and was a leader in the country's feminist movement, died on Aug. 25 at her home in the western state of Maharashtra. She was 80.

Her death was confirmed by her daughter, Prachi Patankar, who did not specify a cause.

Ms. Omvedt, whose death was widely reported in the Indian news media, was a sociologist who helped pioneer the study of caste systems in South Asia, drawing wider attention to the lives of the Dalits, the oppressed caste once more commonly called the untouchables.

She moved to India in the 1970s, taught at universities there and wrote more than a dozen books, including "Understanding Caste: From Buddha to Ambedkar And Beyond" and a biography of Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, the primary author of the Indian constitution.

She was also a lifelong activist who chose to live among those she worked with and wrote about in Maharashtra, the second most populated state in India. She spoke flawless Marathi, the local language, and spent considerable time doing work in poor communities fighting caste oppression in rural regions.

"She took me to areas unknown and introduced me to Dalit movements new for me," said Ruth Manorama, the head of the nonprofit group National Federation of Dalit Women, referring to her fellow Dalits in India's caste-based hierarchy. "She was the motivator, influencer, a terrific organizer and a scholar with no preconceived notions of her subject."



Ms. Omvedt in 2014. For decades, she collected and translated the texts and work of figures in the anti-caste movement and documented the lives of those around her. Bharat Patankar

Gail Marie Omvedt was born on Aug. 2, 1941, into a Scandinavian immigrant family in Minneapolis. Her father, Jack, worked for years as a lawyer for Native Americans in Minnesota. Her mother, Dorothy, was a homemaker.

After graduating from Carleton College in Minnesota, Ms. Omvedt received a Fulbright scholarship in 1963 to study rural communities in India. She went on to the University of California, Berkeley, where she was active in political protests and earned a master's degree and then a Ph.D. in sociology. She returned to India in 1970 to continue her research for her dissertation on the caste system.

While there, she became involved in movements to mobilize thousands of poorly paid textile mill workers and displaced farmers devastated by drought. During one protest march she met Bharat Patankar, a longtime activist. They married in 1976.

Over the years the couple played an important role in bringing attention to the Maharashtra region's working class struggles, including over women's issues and agricultural and environmental challenges as well as caste system constraints.

Ms. Omvedt gave up her American citizenship and became an Indian citizen in 1983. She began working with her husband to establish Shramik Mukti Dal (Toilers' Liberation League), an organization credited with launching some of the largest organized mass movements against injustices experienced by workers in rural India.

Through that organization she launched a number of feminist campaigns, helping women who were victims of domestic violence, for instance, and those who were abandoned by their husbands and needed to find sustainable work.

For decades, while based at her home in Kasegaon, a village in rural Maharashtra, Ms. Omvedt collected and translated the texts and work of figures in the anti-caste movement and documented the lives of those around her.

For those studying the caste system and identity politics in India, Ms. Omvedt was a key archivist, chronicler and interpreter, said Ms. Manorama, the head of Dalit Women.

In addition to her daughter, Ms. Omvedt is survived by her husband and a granddaughter.

Exhibit 30

Section t



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CALIFORNIA

An activist artist explores caste discrimination and how to fight it



Thenmozhi Soundararajan, a Dalit rights activist and the executive director of Equality Labs, a South Asian civil rights organization, published her book "Trauma of Caste" in November. (Thenmozhi Soundararajan)

BY SUHAUNA HUSSAIN | STAFF WRITER

FEB. 14, 2023 5:53 AM PT



Good morning, and welcome to the Essential California [newsletter](#). It's **Tuesday, Feb. 14**. I'm Suhauna Hussain, a reporter on the L.A. Times business desk. I write about issues affecting workers.

I have a heavy topic to cover today: Dalit caste discrimination.

Formerly known as untouchables, Dalits fall at the bottom of a centuries-old South Asian social hierarchy.

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In the course of my reporting, I've been thinking about workplace discrimination and labor trafficking schemes in the U.S. that involve issues of caste. They can be uniquely fraught, damaging for those targeted and difficult to expose.

A prominent U.S. case involved a now-notorious Berkeley landlord who was the [organizer and leader of an illegal sex, labor and human trafficking ring](#). [The scheme was revealed](#) only after a young Indian woman died, and [local student journalists began to ask questions](#).

[More cases are coming to light](#). A major 2020 lawsuit against Cisco Systems, for example, [alleged caste-based discrimination against a Dalit engineer](#) by two dominant-caste managers. A Seattle city councilmember [announced a proposal last month to add caste to the city's anti-discrimination policy](#).

I wanted to explore this issue more, so I spoke with Thenmozhi Soundararajan, a Dalit rights activists and the executive director of Equality Labs, a South Asian civil rights organization, about her book, published in November.

Soundararajan has spent years fighting caste-based discrimination. Her book comes as violence toward Muslims and low-caste people in India is [on the rise](#), emboldened by the [leadership of Narendra Modi](#), who became prime minister of India in 2014, and his right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party.

The bigotry can replicate itself in the U.S. South Asian community, and affects the lives of over a quarter of a billion people worldwide.

[Attendees of an Indian Independence Day celebration in Anaheim in August](#) charged at a small group of protesters carrying signs that read “Abolish caste” and “Protect India’s Muslim lives.” [A similar celebration in New Jersey featured a bulldozer](#) — a strong symbol, given that Indian officials have used bulldozers to demolish the homes of

Muslim and Dalit activists — in its parade. In November, a truck with a digital billboard showing anti-Muslim messaging [targeted four New Jersey mosques](#).

In “The Trauma of Caste,” Soundararajan explains the continuing violence of the caste system and her own experience of it growing up in California. And she seeks to chart a path forward, particularly for diasporic South Asians in the U.S.

Before we dive in, I want to ask that if you or someone you know has experienced caste discrimination in California — big or small — please don’t hesitate to write to me at suhauna.hussain@latimes.com. Even if you’re not sure you want to air your experience publicly, I want to hear from you.

Questions and answers have been edited for length and clarity.

How did you experience caste oppression growing up as Dalit?

There’s so much shame, because you’re told that you are spiritually defiling before God. And that’s a very profound edge to discrimination because it’s not just that you’re excluded from institutions and that you face violence, but your very divinity is questioned.

I speak out because I saw how much hiding who they were diminished my parents. I saw how much pain it really gave them. And I know that they had sacrificed a lot for me to be here and I wanted to live my life in a way that was authentic in a way that they couldn’t live theirs. If we Dalits stay in the closet, dominant caste-people can pretend that they’ve created a caste-less environment [in the U.S.] — which they haven’t.

It feels like right-wing Hindu nationalists in the U.S. have become bolder in some expressions of bigotry over the past year or so. What do you think is behind this shift?

We're in a moment right now where many dominant-caste people are in networks of bigotry — filtered bubbles — that allow them to justify more and more extreme behavior. And that can range from outright usage of caste slurs, to gaslighting whether or not caste exists.

I've had the police called on me. I've been shoved. I faced rape and death threats. When you talk to [Brahmin supremacists] you can see they're not even operating from a place of fact, their nervous systems are so triggered to view equity as a survival-level threat. But there is nothing inherently threatening about asking for our equal rights towards the law. It's not unlike the people who throw temper tantrums when we're teaching the history of slavery.

Last year you were scheduled to give a talk to Google News employees for Dalit History Month. But [that talk was canceled](#) after some Google employees reportedly spread disinformation, calling you “Hindu-phobic” and “anti-Hindu” in emails. How do you grapple with that?

I was speaking about the issue of caste equity and there were bigots that shared that they were afraid for their lives if I were to speak about caste equity. Think about how absurd that is. Right? No one has ever died from a DEI talk being given, as far as I can tell. Their nervous systems went to that place of anxiety, because they are so unable to share space with a Dalit person. Think about how big that divide is in our community, that that's where we're at.

So for me, speaking my truth about not only being cast-oppressed, but also creating an urgency for us to heal this division across our community is really the need of the hour.

In the book, you talked about taking a trauma-informed approach to tackling caste-oppression. What are some specific steps people can take?

There's really specific steps for South Asians. And then there's really specific steps for allies.

I think for allies, we really want people to understand that this is a world that is really active. And there's a reckoning going on, for the South Asian community's relations to caste and religious oppression. The best way to be supportive is to learn about it. Be part of caste equity movements. Consider thinking about ways that you can be an ally in your own workspace, like pushing to add caste as a protected category, inviting relevant speakers to build awareness.

For South Asians, I think that we have a long journey of reckoning, as the threat of mass atrocity looms in our homeland. Every person that reads this book I hope has more tools to understand their own past lineage— what benefits or privileges and also what deprivation and trauma they may have endured.

For the caste-privileged, there's a lot of work to be done to build resilience related to examining your background and challenging bigotry in interpersonal relationships. It can be unpleasant to find out, "oh, I was complicit with violence" or, "oh, I was actually part of a caste that exploited labor or land." The discomfort is such a crucial place of learning.

For caste-oppressed people, there's really this invitation to take time to acknowledge the grief and the pain, everything that has denied us or dehumanized us, and for us to use that and open up possibilities for care and healing.

And now, **here's what's happening across California:**

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Exhibit 30

Section u

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<https://www.wsj.com/articles/seattle-becomes-first-city-in-u-s-to-ban-caste-discrimination-360f81bc>

U.S.

Seattle Becomes First City in U.S. to Ban Caste Discrimination

The U.N. has estimated more than 250 million people worldwide face caste discrimination



The Seattle City Council vote to add caste as a category to its antidiscrimination laws drew people to City Hall on Tuesday.

PHOTO: JOHN FROSCHAUER/ASSOCIATED PRESS

By **Talal Ansari** [Follow](#)

Updated Feb. 21, 2023 8:30 pm ET

Seattle leaders voted to ban discrimination by caste, a hierarchical system going back thousands of years in India that some South Asians say has affected them in the U.S.

Seattle's City Council added caste as a category to its antidiscrimination laws in a 6-1 vote Tuesday.

The ordinance makes Seattle the first city in the U.S. to take such a step, according to Council member Kshama Sawant.

Dr. Sawant, who was born in India and worked there as a computer engineer before emigrating to the U.S., proposed the ordinance.

"Caste discrimination doesn't only take place in other countries. It is faced by South Asian American and other immigrant working people in their workplaces, including in the tech sector in Seattle and in cities around the country," she said at a press conference in support of the ordinance late last month.

The caste system in India is a hierarchical system an individual is born into. At the bottom of the caste system are those once called "untouchables"—now known as Dalits, or oppressed people.

While mainly dominant in South Asia, caste-based systems and societal hierarchical systems are also present in the Middle East, Japan, Nigeria, Somalia and Senegal, according to a 2016 report by a United Nations special rapporteur. The report estimated that more than 250 million people experience caste-based discrimination worldwide, including those who have moved away from their country of birth.

U.S. universities including the California State University system, University of California, Davis and Brown University have recognized caste as a protected category in recent years.

In 2020, the California Department of Fair Employment and Housing filed a federal lawsuit against Cisco Systems Inc. and two managers for discrimination, alleging the managers forced an employee to accept a caste hierarchy within the workplace. Cisco has said it has zero tolerance for discrimination. The company

said at the time it thoroughly examined the concerns raised and found no evidence or discrimination or retaliation based on caste.

Before the vote Tuesday, the Seattle City Council heard over 100 comments from residents and others, both in person and virtually, in an at-times contentious hearing.



Seattle Council member Kshama Sawant proposed the ordinance.
PHOTO: JOHN FROSCHAUER/ASSOCIATED PRESS

The ordinance has faced opposition, including among some Hindu American groups. The Coalition of Hindus of North America and the Hindu American Foundation have said it reinforces stereotypes of the Hindu religion and Indians, and “racist, colonial tropes of ‘caste.’”

“Caste is falsely conflated with Hinduism & the Seattle resolution would falsely single out Indian Hindus for policing,” Suhag Shukla, executive director of the Hindu American Foundation, said in a tweet.

Dr. Sawant, a socialist, has said existing protections against discrimination are insufficient to protect people based on their caste identity. The Seattle Municipal Code already included protections against discrimination by race, sex, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, religion, ancestry, national origin, citizenship or immigration status, and military status, among others.

Write to Talal Ansari at talal.ansari@wsj.com

Exhibit 30

Section v

NewsRoom

7/1/20 AP Bus. News 23:04:31

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July 1, 2020

California sues Cisco for bias based on Indian **caste system**

TALI ARBEL, AP Technology Writer

NEW YORK

NEW YORK (AP)— **California regulators** have sued Cisco Systems, saying an engineer faced discrimination at the company's Silicon Valley headquarters because he is a Dalit Indian.

India's **caste system** long placed Dalits at the bottom of a social hierarchy, once terming them "untouchables." Inequities and violence against Dalits have persisted for decades after India banned caste discrimination.

The engineer worked on a team at Cisco's San Jose headquarters with Indians who all immigrated to the U.S. as adults, and all of whom were of high caste, according to the lawsuit filed Tuesday by the California Department of Fair Employment and Housing .

The "higher caste supervisors and co-workers imported the discriminatory system's practices into their team and Cisco's workplace," the lawsuit says.

It says Cisco's treatment of the employee, who is not named, violated the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and California's Fair Employment and Housing Act.

The Civil Rights Act bans employment discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex and national origin. The lawsuit notes the employee is Dalit Indian, and that he is darker-complexioned than non-Dalit Indians.

"It is unacceptable for workplace conditions and opportunities to be determined by a hereditary social status determined by birth," said DFEH Director Kevin Kish.

Two men who were Cisco supervisors and higher-caste Indians, Sundar Iyer and Ramana Kompella, are named in the suit for discriminating and harassing the employee. The employee received less pay and fewer opportunities, and when he opposed "unlawful practices, contrary to the traditional order between the Dalit and higher castes, Defendants retaliated against him," the lawsuit says.

Cisco did not steps to prevent this discrimination, the suit says.

The suit says that Iyer told other workers that the employee was Dalit and enrolled at India's prestigious Indian Institute of Technology through affirmative action. The employee contacted Cisco human relations, wanting to file a discrimination

complaint against Iyer, and then Iyer took away his responsibilities and made other changes that reduced the employee's role and made him feel isolated from his coworkers. The suit says Iyer disparaged the employee to coworkers and said they should avoid him.

After Iyer stepped down, Kompella replaced him, and the suit says Kompella "continued to discriminate, harass, and retaliate" against the employee, including by "giving him assignments that were impossible to complete under the circumstances."

The lawsuit says that Cisco investigated and did not "substantiate any caste-based or related discrimination or retaliation" against the employee.

Cisco Systems Inc., a major supplier of computer networking gear that makes the internet work, said in a statement that it is committed to an inclusive workplace.

It said it has "robust processes to report and investigate concerns raised by employees," which it followed in this case, and that it is in compliance with all laws and its own policies. The company said will defend against the allegations in the complaint.

Cisco spokeswoman Helen Saunders declined to say if Iyer and Kompella were still at Cisco, referring a reporter to LinkedIn.

---- Index References ----

Company: CISCO SYSTEMS INC; INDIAN INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY GANDHINAGAR (THE)

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July 13, 2020

Section: /opinions/global-opinions

A new lawsuit shines a light on **caste discrimination** in the U.S. and around the world

Thenmozhi **Soundararajan**

Thenmozhi Soundararajan, a Dalit American artist and activist, is the founder and executive director of Equality Labs , a Dalit civil rights organization.

As the United States faces a reckoning over its enduring racial caste system, a critical new front for civil rights was opened against the original system of **caste discrimination** that began in South Asia. In June, California's Department of Fair Employment and Housing launched a lawsuit against Cisco for **caste discrimination** toward an Indian American engineer, who claims he was harassed by two co-workers and faced retaliation after complaining to the company.

Though the case is still pending and Cisco says it intends to "defend itself," the lawsuit is a watershed moment for caste-oppressed Americans like me. It is the first time in U.S. history that caste is at the core of a discrimination case — and an important recognition that **caste discrimination** continues here and around the world.

Caste is a structure of oppression that affects more than 260 million people worldwide. This exclusionary system ranks people at birth, with one's caste determining every aspect of their life — their job, whom they marry, and where they worship. Dalits, who are at the bottom of this system, are branded "untouchable" and sentenced to a caste apartheid of separate neighborhoods, places of worship and schools, as well as punishing violence. Despite laws against **caste discrimination** in South Asia, the impunity surrounding this oppressive system is unyielding to this day.

In the United States, caste does not operate with the same virulence as in our countries of origin. But the diaspora has seen our share of structural and interpersonal caste violence. I have experienced **caste discrimination** here: casteist slurs, untouchability practiced on me and my family, and aggression from police while protesting for our rights. When I came out as a Dalit-American woman, I faced rape and death threats that were part of campaigns to intimidate me. This violence forces many caste-oppressed people into silence.

In 2016, Equality Labs conducted the first survey on **caste discrimination** in the United States, helmed by Dr. Maari Zwick Maitreyi and myself. Surveying more than 1,500 respondents, we uncovered a problem that was much larger than we expected: One in four Dalits surveyed reported facing physical and verbal assault, one in three faced educational discrimination, and two in three workplace discrimination.

This is why California's caste case is so pivotal. The Cisco case opens up ramifications not just in California, but for all American companies with Indian employees in India and the United States that could face new legal scrutiny — particularly technology companies.

All the elements of a hostile workplace exist for caste-oppressed Americans in Silicon Valley, which is often referred to within these networks as "Agraharam Valley," invoking the part of an Indian village in which Brahmins, or members of the dominant caste, reside. The cycle begins in "premier" Indian educational institutions, such as the Indian Institutes of Technology, where dominant castes make up the majority of professors and students and where, as professor Ajantha Subramanian writes, successes are attributed solely to merit without acknowledgment of caste-based structural advantages. As a result, Dalit professors, students and workers face systemic discrimination, bullying and ostracization.

Because much of Silicon Valley's tech talent is recruited from these institutions, our research has shown that those from dominant castes are able to use internal referrals, appraisals and peer reviews to help create teams made up of their networks. Dalit employees have to evade detection of their caste and religion in this hostile environment.

One engineer who works for a Silicon Valley tech company shared how a supervisor tried to defend the caste system during a meeting with a client. After the engineer spoke out that the system was a curse for caste-oppressed people, he says his performance appraisal was impacted and others in the company learned about his caste.

Dalit women in tech face another series of challenges. One engineer reported to Equality Labs that her department supervisor discovered she was part of the Valmiki Dalit caste whose members, called "manual scavengers," were often forced to clean up excrement. Her supervisor shared this with her team and they started ridiculing her, even asking her to clean up after team meetings. She left that workplace after she was sexually harassed by one of her supervisors, and believes she was targeted in connection to the prevalence of caste-based sexual violence in India.

The fact that **caste discrimination** plagues the big tech firms is particularly enraging because many of these platforms have hosted enormous amounts of caste-based violence. Advocacy from Equality Labs has helped ensure caste is treated more seriously as a protected category for content moderation in Facebook, YouTube and Twitter. Yet most companies, including Google and Facebook, still have not added caste to their human resources guidelines.

There is much more that U.S. and global institutions can do to address **caste discrimination**, including adding caste as a protected category in civil rights laws and company policies; conducting audits of caste and religious bias; implementing training and zero-tolerance policies for hostility in the workplace; and investing in scholarships, training sessions and coaching for caste-oppressed employees to thrive and advance.

Still, this lawsuit is an urgent first step to recognize the violence so many Dalits have endured for years. The time to end **caste discrimination** — both in the United States and around the world — is now.

Read more:

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Rana Ayyub: Outrage over an elephant and celebrities embracing Black Lives Matter expose India's deep hypocrisy

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NewsRoom

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Section x

The Specter of Caste in Silicon Valley

Indian immigrants from Dalit backgrounds are rising up against caste discrimination at their workplaces in the United States.

July 14, 2020

By Yashica Dutt

Ms. Dutt is the author of the memoir, “Coming Out as a Dalit.”

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On June 30, California’s Department of Fair Employment and Housing regulators sued Cisco Systems Inc., for discrimination. The cause was not, like most workplace discrimination lawsuits, based on race, gender, age or sexual orientation. It was based on caste.

The lawsuit accuses Cisco, a multibillion-dollar tech conglomerate based in San Jose, Calif., of denying an engineer, who immigrated from India to the United States, professional opportunities, a raise and promotions because he was from a low caste, or Dalit, background. The lawsuit states that his Indian-American managers, Sundar Iyer and Ramana Kompella, who are described as high-caste Brahmins, harassed the engineer because of their sense of superiority rooted in the Hindu caste system.

Many Indian-Americans reacted with disbelief that a giant corporation in Silicon Valley could be mired in caste discrimination. For Dalit Americans like me, it was just another Wednesday.

Dalit, which means “oppressed,” is a self-chosen identity for close to 25 percent of India’s population, and it refers to former “untouchables,” the people who suffer the greatest violence, discrimination and disenfranchisement under the centuries-old caste system that structures Hindu society.

Caste is the gear that turns every system in India. “If Hindus migrate to other regions on earth, Indian Caste would become a world problem,” B.R. Ambedkar, the greatest Dalit leader and one of the architects of the India Constitution, wrote in 1916. He was prophetic.

Caste prejudice and discrimination is rife within the Indian communities in the United States and other countries. Its chains are even turning the work culture within multibillion-dollar American tech companies, and beyond. The Cisco engineer, whose complaint led to the lawsuit and who identifies himself as a Dalit, has not been named in the lawsuit.

From the mid-1990s, American companies, panicking at the feared “millennial meltdown” of computer systems, were hiring close to 100,000 technology workers a year from India. An overwhelming majority of the Indian information technology professionals who moved to the United States were from “higher castes,” and only a handful were Dalits.

Over the Fourth of July weekend, I participated in a video call with about 30 Dalit Indian immigrants. A Dalit information technology professional on the video call spoke about moving to the United States in 2000 and working at Cisco between 2007 and 2013. “A large percentage of the work force was already Indian,” he told us. “They openly discussed their caste and would ask questions to figure out my caste background.”

Higher caste Indians use the knowledge of a person’s caste to place him or her on the social hierarchy despite professional qualifications. “I usually ignored these conversations,” the Dalit worker added. “If they knew I was Dalit, it could ruin my career.”

According to the lawsuit, Mr. Iyer, one of the Brahmin engineers at Cisco, revealed to his other higher-caste colleagues that the complainant had joined a top engineering school in India through affirmative action. When the Dalit engineer, the lawsuit says, confronted Mr. Iyer and contacted Cisco’s human resources to file a complaint, Mr. Iyer retaliated by taking away the Dalit engineer’s role as lead on two technologies.

For two years, the lawsuit says, Mr. Iyer isolated the Dalit engineer, denied him bonuses and raises and stonewalled his promotions. Cisco’s human resources department responded by telling the Dalit engineer that “caste discrimination was not unlawful” and took no immediate corrective action. Mr. Kompella, the other Brahmin manager named in the lawsuit, replaced Mr. Iyer as the Dalit engineer’s manager, and according to the suit, “continued to discriminate, harass, and retaliate against” him.

In 2019, Cisco was ranked No. 2 on Fortune’s 100 Best Workplaces for Diversity. The technology giant got away with ignoring the persistent caste discrimination because American laws don’t yet recognize Hindu caste discrimination as a valid form of exclusion. Caste does not feature in Cisco’s diversity practices in its operations in India either. It reveals how the Indian information technology sector often operates in willful ignorance of the terrifying realities of caste.

In “The Other One Percent: Indians in America,” a 2016 study of people of Indian descent in the United States, the authors Sanjoy Chakravorty, Devesh Kapur and Nirvikar Singh estimated that “over 90 percent of migrants” came from high castes or dominant castes. According to a 2018 survey by Equality Labs, a Dalit-American led civil rights organization, 67 percent of Dalits in the Indian diaspora admitted to facing caste-based harassment at the workplace.

In the backdrop of caste supremacy in the Indian diaspora in the United States, when higher-caste Hindus often describe and demonize Dalits as “inherently lazy/ opportunistic/ not talented,” even apparently innocuous practices like peer reviews for promotions (Cisco and several other tech companies operate on this model), can turn into minefields, ending in job losses and visa rejections for Dalits.

Almost every Dalit person I spoke to in the United States, after California filed the lawsuit against Cisco, requested to remain anonymous and feared that revealing their identity as a Dalit working in the American tech industry filled with higher-caste Indians would ruin their career.

Those words also governed my life until 2016, when I decided to publicly reveal my caste identity and “come out” as Dalit. Growing up “passing” as a dominant-caste person in India while hiding my “untouchable,” caste I lived in the same fear that stops most Dalits from articulating their harassment and asserting their identity in India and the United States.

The overwhelmingly higher-caste Indian-American community is seen as a “model minority” with more than an average \$100,000 median income and rising cultural and political visibility. But it has engendered a narrative that is as diabolical as it is in India: insisting that they live in a “post-caste world” while simultaneously upholding its hierarchical framework that benefits the higher-caste people.

Ranging from seemingly harmless calls for “vegetarian-only roommates” (an easy way to assert caste purity), caste-based temple networks that automatically exclude “impure” Dalits, and the more overt and dangerous arm twisting of American norms — right-wing Hindu activist organizations tried to remove any mention of caste from California’s textbooks in 2018 — caste supremacy is fiercely defended, almost as a core tenet of Indian Hindu culture.

Yet after decades of being silenced, Dalit Americans are finally finding a voice that cannot be ignored. I was able to come out as Dalit because after moving to New York and avoiding Indian-only communities, for the first time, I was not scared of someone finding out my caste. Finding comfort and inspiration in movements like Black Lives Matter and Say Her Name and the tragic institutional murder of a Dalit student activist in India, I was able to understand and acknowledge that my history was a tapestry of pride, not shame.

Most Dalits in America still live with the fear of being exposed. But the pending California vs. Cisco case is a major step in the right direction.

Yashica Dutt is an Indian journalist and the author of the memoir, “Coming Out as a Dalit.”

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